



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
A COURSE OF SERMONS

BY THE LATE
FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE

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PREFACE.

THE sermons contained in this volume, together with one which is not forthcoming, represent a course preached by Mr. Maurice at St. Peter's, Vere Street, between October 20, 1861, and July 27, 1862. The date of preaching is generally marked, but has been omitted in four instances, of which the dates have not been recovered. That the sermons were meant by Mr. Maurice himself for publication may be inferred from the heading of one of them—"2nd of the series on the Acts." The missing sermon must have dealt with the latter part of the 5th and former part of the 6th chapter, and must have dwelt more or less upon the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Two sermons of Mr. Maurice's are indeed extant, both having for their text the 30th and 31st verses of chapter 5, but neither of them can be worked into the series. One is printed in *Sermons Preached in Country Churches*, under the title of "St. Peter's Conversion"

(No. 5 of the volume), but apparently from an earlier MS., the conclusion being erased and replaced by a much longer one in the MS. The other is a splendid discourse, but is substantially an exposition of the Collect for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity, when it was first preached, and not a comment on the text of the Acts. It has therefore been found impossible to fill the gap.

In settling the text I have had the help of Colonel Maurice, and owe much to his kind aid.

JOHN M. LUDLOW.

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

A COURSE OF SERMONS.

I.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(20th October, 1861.)

“ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”—Acts i. 9.

THIS week we have been keeping the festival of St. Luke. The collect for his day speaks of him as a Physician and as an Evangelist. I had intended to connect those two offices together in a discourse respecting him. But I have been led by thinking of him to the book which tells us all we know of his labours, the book which he himself wrote. It seems to me that no book may do us more good than that one if we read it carefully and devoutly. I fancy I see in it much that we want specially at this time. I propose, if God permit, to deliver a series of sermons upon it.

We call it the Acts of the Apostles. Yet it only alludes to two or three of the apostles. It says little

of more than one, St. Peter, of those who were called by our Lord when He was upon earth. We lose sight of St. Peter himself after the fifteenth chapter, where we are told of his appearing at the council which was held at Jerusalem to discuss the question of bringing the Gentiles under the Jewish Law. That apostle, who was not of the original twelve, who was called by Christ after He had ascended on high, from the thirteenth chapter onwards is the most prominent person in the narrative. But we only accompany him as far as his prison in Rome. Then the story closes. We have no tidings concerning the death of him or any of his brethren, saving a single line, which announces that Herod slew James, the brother of John, with the sword.

Can this be a record of the Acts of the Apostles, in the sense which we commonly give to such a title? I rather think, my friends, that St. Luke had no dream of relating their acts, except so far as they explained the acts of One who was much higher than they. "The former treatise," he says, "have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen." The plain inference is that his second treatise is a continuation of the first. He does not really suppose a break in them. Where one ends the other opens. The former spoke of what Jesus began to do and teach, the latter speaks of what He went on to do and teach. The first is the gospel of His acts before His ascension; the other is the gospel of His acts after His ascension. If we read it with this thought

on our minds, I think we shall find it to be a continuous and a harmonious narrative. We shall not be puzzled by what is omitted about this man or that. We shall perceive that the historian had too serious a business on hand, and had events of too great importance to record, to care whether or not he satisfied our curiosity about one individual teacher or another. So far as their acts concerned the great purpose of which he was writing, we shall hear of them; no farther. If we can get any clear glimpses of what they were—of their strength or of their weaknesses—while they are passing across the stage, he is glad that we should have them. The men were dear to him; he knew some of them intimately; he will give us any help he can in forming a portrait of them; but he has something else to speak of which, he believes, all ages and countries are interested in. These apostles, he conceives, had a gospel for mankind. What that was, how it was proclaimed; how it spread; whom it comprehended; this is his subject. He would count it a terrible offence to forsake that subject for any by-ends; to exalt any favourite hero.

It may be said that St. Luke was the companion of St. Paul; that he was, in some sense, his hero; that the narrative of the events which befel him does eclipse that of the teachers who were ministers of Christ whilst he was a persecutor. I think, as we proceed, this fact will explain itself to us; that we shall find it does not require any apology; that the narrative would have been maimed and have failed of its object, if any one had occupied the place in it which is given to the Apostle of the Gentiles. It is in that character that he comes before us; he is not St. Luke's friend;

we have no private anecdotes of him, such as a partial biographer would care to preserve. What we hear of his inner and personal life we hear from himself. The historian shows him to us only as the instrument of declaring the Son of God to men of different tribes and nations as their King.

It is in that character that the Evangelists have set forth Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist came preaching the baptism of repentance, and saying that One should come after him and should baptize with the spirit and with fire. How Jesus, coming in great humility, showed himself to be a King; how He exercised dominion over the Nation and over the bodies and spirits of men; how all His parables related to this kingdom; how He entered Jerusalem amidst the multitude of the disciples blessing Him as the King who came in the name of the Lord; how he was arraigned as a King, and was crucified as a King, St. Luke has told us in his former treatise. He begins this treatise with telling that "he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs," and that He spoke "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." He then told His apostles to "wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." All this connects the time to come with the time that has been. One is to be the fulfilment of the promises made in the other. The appearance of our Lord on earth was the assertion of His authority; the partial exhibition of it. He was about to give fuller and mightier tokens of it. The signs of His power whilst He was dwelling on earth were to show what kind of power it was, and how

certainly He would subdue all powers of a different kind ; how certainly He would reign everywhere.

The apostles quite understood that He had come to establish a kingdom. Whatever difficulties they might have upon other subjects, whatever difficulties might still remain in their minds respecting the nature of the kingdom itself, that it was to be one in the strictest sense they could have no doubt. His promise would have been a dream ; His miracles, His parables, would have been deceptions ; His command to them to go and preach His kingdom would have been a deception, if it had not been so. And they could not doubt that this kingdom was to fulfil the promises made to Israelites. They cared, as they were bound to care, that their country should not be in bondage. The question which they asked when they were gathered round Him was an honest, faithful one. None showed more their confidence in Him as a deliverer : “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” The answer which He made them was not a discouraging one. He did not say, ‘It is not My purpose to restore the kingdom to Israel, I have come for no such end !’ Such a reply would have bewildered, not cleared, their minds. His answer was, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” These words recalled to their minds what He had been saying to them so continually while He was with them. It was the kingdom of a Father. They were to be not the servants but the children of Him from whom it

came. They might trust Him with all times and seasons. He would raise them above the thought of times and seasons. He would endue them with His own Eternal Spirit. He would give them the power which should enable them to know what the kingdom was, and to bear witness of it. They would indeed testify of it to their own countrymen. They would be able to tell them that all which God promised to the fathers had been fulfilled to their children. They would be able to say to the people of Judæa that the Son of David had the highest throne of all. But what they would say could not be confined to Jerusalem and Judæa, would not be a blessing only to Jerusalem and Judæa ; it would be for the uttermost ends of the earth.

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” That is all which is said. The simplest words are used, and the fewest, to denote the mightiest of facts. Think of it simply and quietly. They had walked with Him for two or three years. They were sure that He was related to them ; they were sure that He was related to One whom they could not see. He said He had come from a Father ; He said He was going to a Father. The Lord was laid in the grave ; He had come back again. They had seen Him, handled Him, eaten with Him. They saw Him but seldom. He came among them, and vanished out of their sight. At last on this day, after He had uttered those last words about the power which He would send them, and the witness they should bear of Him, He disappeared out of their sight altogether. The words were accomplished. He had gone to His

Father. They fixed their eyes on the visible heaven, supposing He was there. It was a natural dream; but it was rebuked and broken. "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." They were words not to be understood at once but brooded over. Long years, bitter experiences might be necessary to interpret them. They must wait, as they had been told, for the promise of the Father before they could enter into them even imperfectly. But at least they could obey the heavenly command. They ceased to gaze up like Pagans into a visible heaven, as if that was the dwelling-place of Him whom they had owned as the Christ, the King of men, the Son of God. They must seek for Him in another way than that. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." This was interpreting the Ascension rightly. He had ascended to His Father and to their Father, to His God and their God. They had therefore a sense of unity and fellowship which they had never known before. They were one body, one family; apostles

and mere disciples, men as well as women ; the kinsmen of Jesus after the flesh, now more certain that they were related to Him than when He was going in and out among them. It was a bond which nothing could break. And this fellowship could only find its expression in prayer and worship. They belonged to that world into which He had gone. His native home must be theirs. They were one in Him. They were one because they could indeed, in His name, say the prayer which He had taught them.

But this sense of a home in heaven is not to give them the least exemption from the work of earth. Their supplications were fitting them for that work. They were learning that this heaven is not theirs ; that it is a common inheritance ; that He who is gone to it is the Lord of men ; that they are to bear witness of Him as such to His subjects. St. Peter rises up in the midst of them. He has been led to meditate on the choice which our Lord had made of twelve men to be His apostles. There must have been a reason for the number. The twelve tribes would at once occur to a few as a reason. But one of them was there no more. Judas had by transgression fallen and gone to his own place. He had passed sentence upon himself. He had been his own murderer. All other crimes seemed to gather themselves into his crime. He was *the* betrayer. He had betrayed *the* Friend, the Prince of Life. Old words rush upon the apostle's mind as he dwells upon the work to which Judas had been called, and from which he has cast himself out. If that office was to testify of the kingdom of heaven, which kings and prophets had

been expecting; if it was to say that the Desire of all nations had come, the words of kings and prophets must point to this great consummation of their longings and hopes. It did not signify what might be the occasion which first called them forth; they must have their fulfilment in the Son of Man.

We shall find how deeply this belief penetrated the minds of the preachers of the gospel; we may have many occasions to consider it and examine the grounds of it hereafter. Here we have the first instance of it. St. Peter finds in the 109th Psalm words too terrible for any private or personal enemy. It must denounce an enemy of all human beings; an enemy of good itself; of *the Good Being*. It must speak of some one who was entrusted with a mighty office of blessing, and has turned it into a curse. It must say that such a one cannot make a divine calling void because he is unfit for it; that another must undertake his work. So the apostle reads the Psalm. It would not of itself have told him anything. But it mixes with the other thought by which he is inspired at that moment; it comes into his mind as a confirmation and warrant for the course which he recommends. They must choose a successor to Judas. The witness which they are to bear to the nation will not be complete unless they do. The persons among whom the choice is to be made are determined by the nature of the testimony. They are to speak of Jesus who was crucified. They are to declare that He had risen from the dead, and that so He had been shown to be the Son of God, the Conqueror of the great destroyer. Only one who had been with them from the first, who had heard the words of Jesus, who had seen Him after

He was risen, can be fit to bear this message. They fix upon two in whom these conditions meet. They are afraid to do more. They cast lots. They have no faith in chance. They ask God, who knows the hearts, to decide which He has chosen.

So these hundred and twenty peasants of Galilee proceed, with great solemnity and in great simplicity, to gird themselves for a task of which the world is to know something by-and-bye. I shall say nothing to-day of the after history. I wish that it should come out before us in the order in which St. Luke has delivered it. But I wish you to reflect for two or three moments over what he has told us already.

1. The great point on which I have wished to fix your attention is that the message of the gospel, so far as it is delivered to us in this book, and so far as we are interested in it, begins from our Lord's Ascension. The message—"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"—was heard in the wilderness of Judaea when John came baptizing; it was repeated by the lips of Jesus Himself, and illustrated by His discourses and confirmed by His acts. The twelve apostles, Judas among them, preached in the different cities and villages of Palestine. But the message—"The kingdom of heaven is come"—is grounded upon the assertion that He whom the Jews rejected is at the right hand of God, that there is an actual Mediator between God and man; that He has overcome the enemies of man. Do not let us forget it. This is the proclamation upon which Christendom rests. It is the proclamation, not of a doctrine but of a Person; it is the proclamation of that Person as One whom men may trust because He is their deliverer; of One who has opened

to them a way into the presence of a Father ; of One who is mightier than any powers which can strive against them. It is this or it is nothing.

Again, if that which we read in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles comes to anything, if it is not a mere momentary excitement, the dream of a few fanatics, it must issue in the formation of a society. Everything points to that. The apostles were spoken to as a body by their Lord. They feel themselves to be such. They meet together, not to the exclusion of those who are not apostles, but who share their other bonds ; they meet as those who have bonds to each other ; who are to prove that they have in all their after-life. They complete their number ; they regard themselves not as a set of individuals, accidentally brought together by common tastes and opinions ; but called out, brought into a fellowship by One who alone could bind them ; destined for a work which will not be done if any one suppose that he has an interest apart from the rest.

And thirdly, the bond of their union is worship. Worship of a Being with whom they can claim an actual relation, because He has claimed a relation with them by sending His Son to bear their nature and die their death. Worship of a Being who knows what they have need of before they ask ; and who, if they ask, will teach them what they have need of. Worship of a Being who can enable them to be true when they feel most tempted to be false ; who can preserve them in unity when their impulses to division are strongest.

And lastly, the calling of these apostles, as of all the hundred and twenty men and women, is simply and

strictly to be witnesses of a good which concerns all their countrymen as well as themselves, which they have been told, however little they may have taken in the force of the words, must reach the uttermost ends of the earth. They have actually no treasure which they can call their own. They are simply stewards of a treasure for all kindreds and people. If they ever fancy the case to be otherwise; if they think that Christ belongs to them, because they are permitted to know what He is and what He has done for the world, their strength will disappear, their life will be gone; every truth which they hold will be inverted; they will become as the Jewish people, the old stewards of the divine wealth had become, haters of men and haters of God.

These lessons, my friends, are suggested by the history of the Church in its infancy. I should not feel the history of the infancy so precious as I do feel it, so needful for us, if I did not believe that the same lessons were suggested by all the events that have befallen it in its youth, and manhood, and age; by all that so befalls it now. If I have gone back to the principles upon which it was established, it is because I deem that those principles have never waxed old, can never wax old; because I am sure that we have forgotten them and may forget them to our ruin; because I am sure that when they are least prized by those who call themselves members of the Christian Church, the Head of that Church will make them manifest, by manifesting Himself.

II.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(27th October, 1861.)

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”—Acts ii. 1.

THE feast of Pentecost must have looked very strange to an Israelite in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar. His fathers in the wilderness, about fourteen centuries before, had been told to keep it. The wheat harvest of which it spoke was gathered in now as it had been then. It had been gathered in through all the generations since. Men lived by bread of some kind or other in those days as they had lived in the days of Moses. But lands which were then desert had been taken into cultivation. Those who had then thought only of tilling the land or fighting for it had become traders, money-dealers. Those who were then a small horde travelling through a desert had become settled in cities. They had passed through various stages of prosperity and suffering. They had been an independent nation. They had fallen under various tyrants. They had at last become a part of a great world-empire. They had

become mixed in the trades and occupations of the people among whom they dwelt. They spoke their dialects. Doubtless they were still a separate people, and were so regarded by the inhabitants of the Greek, or Asiatic, or African cities, in which they were fixed. They had their peculiar customs. They had their synagogues. They kept themselves from idols, and from all the practices that appertained to the worship of idols. They looked upon Jerusalem as a centre to them. But were they to leave their local business for the sake of going to Jerusalem that they might practise an old ceremony ? That ceremony had no doubt been valuable in former days. It had been a witness to them that they were one people. It had kept alive their sympathies for each other. But in what sense were they one people now ? They were not one in belief. Jerusalem was rent asunder with sects. Pharisees and Sadducees denounced and hated each other. They were not one in speech. They might all reverence the Hebrew tongue, but it was not the colloquial tongue of Palestine ; it had been changed everywhere else for the tongue of the place wherein they were born or had been brought up. They were not one in government, except in the sense that they were all alike subject to a foreign tyranny which blended all races with theirs. In each separate district Rome had permitted different forms of civil and military jurisdiction, and these Jews, like others, must obey.

To come up to Jerusalem from all the different regions in which they were settled must have seemed to numbers a sheer waste of time ; the repetition of an idle service out of which no good had sprung, or

was likely to spring. But there was an attractive power which drew numbers to the old place at the old time. They might not be able to explain what the power was. An old tradition spoken of in childhood, connected with the voices and works and graves of departed men, has a mysterious force. The words, "God commanded it to our fathers," were still words of terror to some, of comfort to others. The sight of friends and of sacred places has its own charm. Mixed with all memories of the past was a certain feeling that the feast had a present meaning, a certain hope of future blessings that might grow out of it. The thought of a kingdom to be restored one day to Israel never wholly died out of the heart of any child of Abraham.

And so "devout" men at all events, and some who were not devout, did come year after year to this celebration. Whether the news of what had recently happened in Jerusalem gave the visitors this year a new motive; whether they cared to hear more of One who had been crucified by the Roman governors at the instance of the priests for assuming to be the heir of David's throne, or merely assumed that He was one of the many pretenders who aroused an oppressed people by reminding them of the promises made to their fathers; whether the report that Jesus had appeared again after He had been in the grave stirred their curiosity, or was only dismissed as the idlest of fables, we are not told. St. Luke merely says that "there were dwelling at Jerusalem," on the occasion of that feast, "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." He brings that large miscellaneous collection into direct contrast with the small body, all from one

narrow region, all speaking the same uncouth dialect, which were "all with one accord in one place." *They* also were strangers in Jerusalem. In former years they would have been overlooked as utterly insignificant. Now they were saved from insignificance by being suspected. The chief priests had an eye upon them. They might stir up a new insurrection in the name of Him who they said had risen. But the danger was not great. He was not with them any longer. They had given signs of cowardice the moment it was resolved to convict and punish Him. They would probably melt away of themselves. If not, they had lost their hold upon this people; at the Passover the multitude had willingly, even eagerly, given up Jesus to save Barabbas.

Our fathers believed, we profess to believe, that these twelve Galilæans explained to those Jews out of every nation under heaven the secret of their unity—why the Pentecost was not a fiction for their ancestors, why it was not a fiction for them,—what would remain to hold men of every nation under heaven together, when the Jewish festival had passed away. If the New Testament contains any lesson, it contains that lesson. And, as I said last Sunday, if we are to look anywhere for that lesson, it must be to the records in this book; above all, to the records in this chapter.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." There was the outward visible sign of something that was not outward, not visible. That there was need of such a sign to them and to us, I think, we

shall feel, the more we read the history of those who have supposed that spiritual realities can have no possible connection with signs. Starting from that faith, they have begun to make their own feelings and apprehensions the measures and standards of spiritual gifts. They have limited these gifts to themselves. They have regarded them as signs of special favour to individuals, not as intended to unite human beings. And their eagerness to exclude everything that is external has led to the mixing, in a most dangerous way, what is external with what is internal. Mere bodily impressions, visions addressed to the senses, have attained a great power over them. Often the most insignificant symbols of dress and manner have become sacred, almost divine, in their eyes. Therefore, we cannot too steadfastly adhere to that sound philosophical language of our children's Catechism. The outward visible sign must have its own honour, that the inward spiritual grace may have its honour. The New Testament does not create this distinction, but it makes us know how deep and real the distinction is. It never exaggerates the worth of the sign. It leads us straight to the thing signified. It tells us that signs pass away, or are changed for others that are more universal, when they have done their work. But it does not despise them; just as it does not despise the body, but treats it as no less God's handiwork, no less wonderful and divine than the mind which men have exalted in disparagement of it. Here is an instance. There is a sound of a wind, a natural sound, just as water is natural, just as bread and wine are natural. Here are cloven tongues as of fire, an unusual, startling sight, but still natural, appealing to

the senses. Then comes that which is supernatural, that which does not speak to the senses at all. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." These were the tokens to them that the promise which they had heard from their Master was in very deed fulfilled to them. They were sure that there had been in Hinn a life, a power which did not belong to Him because He had a body like theirs. He had commanded things which made them tremble, and they had obeyed Him. He had commanded men, and they had obeyed Him. He had exercised what they felt to be the highest dominion of all, the dominion over spirits. He had said that He exercised that dominion because the Spirit of His Father dwelt in Him. He had said that He was come to bestow that Spirit upon them. He had said that it would be bestowed, not to exalt them in themselves, but that they might testify of Him.

How did they know that this Spirit was indeed ruling and possessing them? Would some glow of feeling, some sudden sense of love to God or of man, have assured them of it? Such feelings might come and might go; they wanted not a sense, but the Giver of that sense, the Source whence it was derived and wherein it might be renewed. But they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." They were able to tell men whom they did not know, with whom they had never conversed, whose customs, education, thoughts, speech, were different from their own, of what was common to them, of that which one had as much an interest in as another. This was a proof indeed; not like that sign of the mighty rushing wind which had first roused their attention: it was a power which assured them

they were not Galilæans but men, which raised them at once from the closest, narrowest circle into the widest human fellowship, which overcame the barriers that seemed hopelessly to separate man from man. It was not like the sign of cloven tongues of fire ; it was the fulfilment of that sign. The tongues were distinct, yet they were one ; each had his own message to deliver in his own way, yet it was the same message ; the message of each would be answered in a different way to those who heard it, yet it was what one as much as another was wanting, and was capable of receiving.

We often divide this gift of the Holy Ghost from that power of speech in which it was seen first. We talk of a common gift in which all Christians are sharers, and of special gifts which belonged to the apostles ; and we wonder that the New Testament seems not always to recognize a difference which men think to be so important. But, my friends, it strikes me that what we call this special gift to the apostles had something very general in it. It did not make them more peculiar than they were before. It united them to their fellows as they had never been united before. It made them understand as they had never understood before why their Lord was regarded as a Leveller whilst He was upon earth, why He seemed always to be breaking through those separations of caste, of race, even of character, which men had deemed it a part of their religion to enforce and preserve. And I cannot help thinking that we have failed to appreciate this day of Pentecost, and to understand why it is so associated with the existence and the continuous life of Christendom, because we

have not reflected enough upon this great witness of the Spirit's presence. Did it not declare that there is a fellowship among men which distinctions of race and nation cannot destroy ? Did it not say that there is a common speech for men beneath all their differences of speech, and implied in them all ? Did it not say that men realize this fellowship, or can hope to discover this common speech, only when they know that they are spiritual beings ? Did it not say that they cannot know themselves to be spiritual beings till they confess that God their Father has sent His adopting Spirit to abide with them ?

The historian tells us the effect of this speaking on the multitude simply and graphically : They " were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans ? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born ? " Then comes the usual revulsion. The question, " What meaneth this ? " produces just the answer which it would have produced in any assembly of the old or modern world : " These men are full of new wine."

We shall not forget that this scoff was the occasion of St. Peter's speech. It obliged him to show that the inspiration which some took for drunkenness had been spoken of as a divine gift by ancient prophets ; that they had not limited it to themselves, but had looked forward to a time when God should pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, when their sons and daughters should prophesy, and their young men should see visions, and their old men should dream

dreams; when not only the servants but the hand-maidens should share the blessing. That there should have been an anticipation of a gift so large and diffusive in Joel, the oldest prophet of all, whose own calling was chiefly to speak of a great plague of locusts which was visiting the land in his time, may well cause us wonder, and may show us how much the promise of such a gift to mankind was implied in the very nature of prophecy, and in all the work which the prophet had to do. He could not feel the stirrings of a divine life and power in himself—feeling at the same time more keenly than other men his weaknesses and sins—without being sure that all good in every man must be from God, without being sure that some day or other it would be clearly shown that God had a kingdom over the hearts and spirits, not of a few illuminated seers, or of a special race, but of “all flesh.” The prophet could not be conscious that he was entrusted with a message to men from God, without being sure that God had a way of making His purpose known to men, and that there was a living communion between Him and men. How this should be might be dark to the prophet as well as to those whom he called to repentance. But it would—he could not doubt it—be manifested. Nor could he help connecting that manifestation with some terrible crisis in his country’s history, some great and terrible day of the Lord, for which this divine inspiration and illumination should prepare the minds of those who received it.

St. Peter, reading this in the book of the old Jewish teacher, could say without hesitation, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” He did not

say—he was not the least bound to say—‘The prophet Joel meant to foretell what should come upon us Galilæans; he foresaw the circumstances of this feast of Pentecost.’ That would have been a very different—a bolder, but, it seems to me, a far inferior and less useful application of the old words. In his application of them they explained how even the most ordinary and vulgar men may be raised above themselves and their own low and beggarly thoughts, just as in drunkenness they fall below themselves; how God may show men that they are made in His image, even as they are apt to reduce themselves to the image of beasts. St. Peter’s application of the words explains also *why* there should have been this manifestation of spiritual life and power put forth then. It was his business to tell his countrymen, mildly but firmly, that a great and terrible day of the Lord was approaching them. They had denied the King who had come to make them one people; they would have to learn whether they could be a people without that King.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

So far he may seem only to be accusing them of a great crime. A righteous man has been among them; he has done them good. His acts had borne witness that the God of goodness and peace had sent him to them. They have murdered the righteous man; not the less murdered because the act was done judicially,

by the hand of a heathen ruler; not the less murdered him because God delivered him into their hands and saw through this act to its ultimate consequences. But the next words carry him further.

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”

Here St. Peter affirms that this righteous man whom they had crucified had been shown to be One whom death could not hold. God, who had delivered Him to die, had raised Him from the dead. And he quotes a passage from the sixteenth Psalm, which we all know, which we should all read naturally as an expression of David’s trust and confidence that the Lord will not forget his soul, which we are taught to use as the expression of the same trust and confidence for ourselves. Are we wrong in putting that construction upon it, in giving it that application? Does St. Peter construe it and apply it in a sense inconsistent with ours? I believe not. David sees death beside him claiming him as its prey. David sees a Lord always before him claiming him from the hands of death. Therefore his heart rejoices and his tongue is glad; therefore he is sure that in some way even in death his soul shall not be left in hell, nor his flesh see corruption. Death

is in like manner beside each of us, claiming each of us for his prey. Have we not a right to see a Lord always before us, who will not leave our souls in hell nor suffer our flesh to see corruption ? If the words merely belonged to David, on the strength of his righteousness or his right to the special favour of God, we have no such right. If St. Peter's doctrine is sound we have a right. For he goes on freely to speak to his listeners of the patriarch David. He knew he had had no special exemption from the lot of other men, notwithstanding his righteousness and his royalty. " He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption." David had perceived the need of a living King, an immortal King, a King who should be the conqueror of death. No other could meet his great necessities ; no other could meet the necessities of his people ; no other could meet the necessities of mankind. That must be the full meaning of the promise of the seed that was to be raised up to sit on his throne. Solomon could not exhaust that promise. It must point to the Lord who was always before him. And it is this Lord, this King, says St. Peter, of whom we testify to you that He is risen. All David's words respecting himself would be nothing, even to himself ; they could never extend at all beyond himself, if there were not such a King ; if He had not died ; if He had not risen.

One step more, and we reach that topic with which St. Luke begins the Acts of the Apostles; from which the gospel message to the world begins: "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The Ascension is not established by long arguments. All that has gone before is unnatural, monstrous, if that is not true. The apostle has nothing to tell his countrymen, if he may not tell them that one of their race, their Brother, for them dying, is ascended to God; that the Lord has said to our Lord, "Sit thou on my right hand," till sin, death, and hell, all enemies, are put under His footstool. The gift of the Spirit implies this; has no signification apart from this. The Eternal God has owned one who bore the burthens of men, and endured the death of men, as His Son; has raised Him above all the powers of evil that fought with them. He has given to men the Spirit of His Son, that they may call Him Father. That Spirit manifests Himself in the lowest peasants of the land. That Spirit has dominion over their heart, their understanding, their life. That Spirit enables them to assert for all what this day conferred on them.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" That

which all terrible denunciation, all long arguments are unable to effect, was produced by this announcement of an actual King and Deliverer. The thought that such an One had come among them, had died for them, had risen for them, was reigning over them, was sending tokens of His care and love; it was this which cut them to the heart. But they have asked a simple question, they must have an answer. Is it this? 'You have committed the blackest of crimes; you must undergo the longest probation before you are admitted to any dim hope of mercy.' It is this—"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.' They had rejected their King; they were to turn to their King. They had been divided from their brethren, by sects and by antipathies more than by distance. They were to enter the service of a King who cared for them all equally; for them and for their children, and for strangers yet unborn. No sound of a "rushing mighty wind," no cloven tongues were needed to signify that they received these gifts of the Spirit. Baptism in water was to be the simple outward sign for them and their children, and for as many as the Lord God should call, that they had the inward spiritual grace; that the Holy Ghost was their first and everlasting Teacher and Comforter; the ground of their fellowship; the Purifier of their hearts; the Inspirer of their thoughts and words. "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." It

was a needful addition to all that had gone before. A generation of men who thought themselves righteous and despised others, a generation which was given over to sects and schools and parties, a generation of self-seekers, was of necessity untoward, must of necessity hate Christ and seek to destroy Him. To be saved from this generation they must claim Him as the Head of all nations and families, as the living way to their Father in Heaven, as the bestower of the Spirit of peace and love and a sound mind to those who are testifying and fighting upon earth. Out of that dying Jewish commonwealth must spring up a new and human commonwealth, quickened with a divine life. Man could not effect such a renovation and new birth. He who raised His Son out of the bonds of death and the grave will effect it.

I shall not speak to-day of the last verses of this chapter. I shall not speak of the actual birth of the new society. But I will beseech you earnestly to remember what is the foundation of that society as it is disclosed to us by an inspired apostle. He could not lay that foundation ; he could only point to what is laid. He could only show that it is large enough and deep enough to sustain the life of all ages and countries ; our children ; the universe.

III.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(3rd November, 1862.)

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”—Acts ii. 41.

WHAT the word was which St. Peter preached, and which these men are said to have gladly received, you have heard this morning. It is contained in this sentence: “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” It is impossible to exaggerate the strangeness of the proclamation. They who heard it had come out of various countries. But they were all Jews by race or by profession. They all reverenced the high priest as the great religious oracle. They all knew that the high priest and the sanhedrim had condemned Jesus to be guilty of death for blasphemously calling Himself the Son of God. They all knew that their own countrymen had delivered Him to the Roman governor as one who assumed to be a King. They knew that He had been crucified on that charge. And now a Galilæan fisherman tells them, one and all, that the God of their fathers has owned this crucified Man as

His Son and their Lord. He calls upon them, one and all, to receive Him and confess Him in that character; by an open and palpable act to avow themselves His subjects. Nothing was concealed by St. Peter which was likely to wound their feelings. Their rulers had done this act—had done it in ignorance of the character of Him whom they had set at nought and reviled; but nevertheless were answerable for it. The people of Jerusalem had taken part in it. To put a righteous man to death upon a false charge was a terrible offence; they had put to death *the* Righteous Man, their own divine Ruler, Him whom all their kings and prophets had testified of and had desired to see.

What proof could he allege in support of a proposition so tremendous, so insulting to the most powerful men of the land, equally insulting to the mob which had supported them, and to the Roman government which had executed their bidding? Could he point to some signs in the heavens, portending destruction to the rebels? Could he say that thunders and lightnings and a devouring fire, such as had made Moses and the Israelites fear and quake before Sinai, were coming forth just when so many were claiming their privileges as members of the Jewish nation, to punish its sins? Let any one consider what kind of arguments, what kind of miracles, have been deemed most effectual by those who were seeking to establish their credit as teachers and prophets in all ages, are deemed most effectual in our age, and he will surely expect some such evidences as these to show that the apostle had a right to be heard. What others could establish a doctrine so unpalatable, could urge any to make a profession which was so perilous?

The evidence of which St. Luke speaks is not of this sort. It was startling evidence; it was not terrific. There was no thunder or lightning; no portent in the sky. A few ignorant peasants, born in an obscure district, knowing only one barbarous speech, are able to make themselves understood by men who have come from all quarters of the empire. What has this sign to do with the message which accompanies it? How is one any confirmation of the other? The apostle gives this interpretation. He who is the highest King of all has already shown forth His highest power in ruling over the spirits of men. He is the same now as when He showed Himself upon earth. He sends forth His Spirit to govern the spirits of men, to speak by them, to enable them to be witnesses of Him, to make them one. This, he says, is what prophets have looked for. They have wanted an actual King, a King in the fullest sense of the word. Such a King cannot give any token of His government which is so mighty, so divine, so general as this.

St. Peter then spoke to the hearts and consciences of those who listened to him. He did not speak to their nerves. He spoke to them as Israelites, the heirs of mighty promises, the stewards of a blessing for mankind. He called on them to repent of their indifference to those promises, of unfaithfulness in that stewardship. He did not tell them that any one promise would fail, that mankind would be defeated of any of the good that had been designed for it. A dark day was coming—must come—upon a nation which refused to be a nation, which rejected Him who could make it a nation indeed. But this gift of a common speech, this token of a common fellowship, was a preparation for

that day, a pledge that the divine purpose was to establish a more perfect unity, not to destroy that which existed already. The message of the apostle, therefore, though it was directed to every individual man and woman in that crowd, was distinctly a message to the nation, and concerning the nation. They were to save themselves from an untoward generation, an evil age which would not have the rights of a nation, the glory of a nation, which would not be one with its forefathers and with those who were to come after it. They were not to save themselves by shrinking into a narrower sect, a more exclusive school. Once and for ever they were to renounce sects and schools. Once and for ever they were to range themselves under the Eternal King. Once, henceforth, and for ever they were to seek that Spirit who is the enemy of the spirit of division, who has come to cast him out.

I must repeat these statements to you ; I must not be weary of repeating them ; that you may see why those who were cut to the heart by the apostle's word should yet gladly have received it, and that you may see what was the consequence of their so receiving it. The gladness may surely be accounted for. They had the dream of a King some day to come among them, some day to set up the throne of David in Jerusalem, some day to trample the heathen under His feet. But what manner of King was He ? How would He feel towards different classes of His people ? Who would be His chief favourites ? Would He prefer the Pharisees ? Would He look with any complacency on the Sadducees ? Could ordinary people—people busy in the ordinary work of the world, toiling for their bread—hope that He would show any compassion to

them? Their consciences told them of a multitude of transgressions—of secret sins of which the world knew nothing. Would not He find out all these? Would not His eyes penetrate into all corners, lay bare the heart within? “Who,” said the prophet, “may abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appeareth?” They compared His work to that of the refiner, who must have the most scorching fires for separating the gold from the dross.

All these thoughts were stirring in those Jews. What signified it to tell them that the great King would break the Roman yoke? That was well. But might He not punish them as the Roman had never punished them? If He laid judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, would He not be more terrible to them than the most unjust of human governors, than any Cæsar, any Herod, any Pilate?

And now St. Peter said, This, even this, is your King; One who does read your hearts as you feared He would; One who does lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet; but One who preaches deliverance to the captives and opening of sight to the blind; One who was called on earth the Friend of publicans and sinners, and is their friend still; the denouncer of woes to all sects, Pharisee or Sadducee; the threatener of calamities to us all if we choose to wrap ourselves in one cloak of pride or another, to vaunt of our money, our rank, our gifts, our virtues, our religion, our divine election; but the source of blessing to all who simply trust in Him as the common Lord, the Chief of all, that became the Servant of all; the sufferer of death that He might be the bestower of eternal life; the Son in whom we may know the Father, and draw nigh to the Father.

For this was another and chief reason for gladness to them who could receive this word. The thought of a great human King, a Son of David, might sometimes be cheering, sometimes fearful. But the Lord God, whom no man had seen or could see, who had heaven for His throne and earth for His footstool, in whose sight the angels were not clean, the Holy, Holy, Holy ; could they ever think of Him without trembling, without a secret wish—Oh ! that we could hide ourselves from Him ! oh ! that we could be preserved from His presence ! Certainly this was not the way in which holy men, whose words they read in the divine book, spoke of Him. They longed to behold Him. They said that in His presence was fulness of joy, at His right hand were pleasures for evermore. But these holy men must have had natures or tastes different from those of common men, though they acknowledged no such difference, though they seemed to feel all the infirmities, all the sins, which other men felt. It was a strange riddle ; who could expound it ? who could make those words of the book real words for men and not for saints, for those who felt the world's burden and longed to cast it off somehow, not to find a heavier burden ?

If the fellow-sufferer with men, He who had been crucified, was indeed the Daysman between the sons of earth and the absolute eternal God ; if they could behold the very nature and mind and purpose of God in Him ; if in Him God saw them as His children ; if through Him there was a way for the spirits of men to ascend to the Father of Spirits ; if through Him the Spirit of the Father did find a road to the spirits of men—the heavy yoke of invisible terrors was taken off

their hearts. They might fly from the evil that beset them—the sorrows and fears which were intolerable—to the perfect good, the perfect deliverance, and the deepest awe might be the most perfect joy.

And if these were reasons for “gladly” receiving the word, they were completed by the conviction that it was not the word of a Galilæan which had seized them and mastered them; that it must be the word of God Himself; that He had been seeking after the spirits which He had lost; that He had found them. So each one felt in that multitude over whom St. Peter exerted an influence. One has heard in the records of insanity how the physician tries to fix the eye of his patient with his own, how it eludes him and wanders from him; how, when it really meets his, he is victorious; the maniac whom no force could have subdued yields to the might of the human countenance. So each man there will have felt as if a loving eye had been tracking him through all his wild, mad wanderings, and now at last had caught and commanded his eye, and had compelled him to yield and to be blessed. But the same process was going on in a number of his fellow-creatures. All were restored and brought to their right mind. They had never known before how they were related to each other, how they were related to their Father in heaven; and yet the relation must always have existed; it was implied in all their acts and thoughts and works. Now they were come to the sense of it. They had found the healthy state of human creatures. And so they were baptized. Three thousand, it is said, were added or joined to the apostles and to each other. They were joined by the profession of no new tenets. Least of all were they

joined by the renouncement of their previous Jewish position. They were not less Jews because they believed that Jesus was the King of the Jews. They now looked upon their privilege as sons of Abraham, as they in whom all the kindreds of the earth were to be blessed. They renounced utterly that which kept them apart from their brethren. They washed off the filth of these sentiments—the pollution of their narrow, selfish notions. They claimed the rights of Jews, which they were soon to learn were the rights of men. And so they would feel a meaning in their common intercourse, a sacramental joy in their daily food.

How strangely unlike the doubt and suspicion they had felt of God, as of one whom they might offend by their simplest acts, who grudged them the blessings which He had bestowed, whose pleasure might be to destroy them !

My friends, is it a dream that such a society existed once ? Is it a dream that such a society exists now ? If it is, why do we bring our children to be baptized ? Why do we come ourselves to eat the bread and drink the wine which testify that we are members of Christ's body, that we were brought into a state of salvation, that His Spirit may be renewed in us day by day ? It is not a dream unless we make it one. For us and for our children and for as many as the Lord our God shall call is the Spirit promised. And He is the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind, that Spirit in which we may give witness that Christ has offered Himself a full and perfect and sufficient sacrifice to God, that Spirit in which we can offer up ourselves as sacrifices holy and acceptable to Him.

IV.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(10th November, 1861—Morning.)

“Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”—Acts iii. 12-16.

THE third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is occupied with the story of the healing of a lame man at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, and with the discourse which St. Peter delivered to the multitude whom the miracle had drawn together. That story and that discourse contain, it seems to me, very profound instruction. If we could really take it in, I think we should understand much more clearly the import of the miracles which are reported in the New Testament; we should know better how to judge of

those that have been spoken of since, in one age or country or another.

“Peter and John,” it is said, “went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.” We are again reminded simply and naturally that the apostles were more than ever Jews, that the services of the Temple were more than ever precious and sacred to them. They go at the prescribed time to the prescribed place; they are obedient to the law. But it is no servile obedience, no deference to an opinion. They have a right to worship the God who has bid men seek Him there; they know in whom they can worship Him.

“And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.” The sight was a familiar one. This particular man was known to all who were in the habit of entering that gate; numbers of similar objects were probably seen there. We have no need to talk of Oriental customs. Every Western traveller—one scarcely need say traveller—has learnt to connect lame beggars with churches, almost expects that the place and hour of worship should be the excuse for asking for alms. The frequency of the spectacle, the experience of imposture, may have dulled his sympathy, but he cannot help owning that there is a fitness in the circumstances. The poor sufferers are claiming fellowship with the fortunate, because they are coming to claim fellowship in Him in whose sight they are equally beggars or equally princes.

“Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the

temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

We know the words so well—they are such obvious words—that we may never have considered how far they accord or disagree with notions that men are wont to entertain. The apostles, you see, bade the lame man look at them. He did look at them, but with no other thought in his mind than that with which he looked at any of the numbers who were going in or out of the Temple. He hoped money from them ; that was all. Then St. Peter tells him they have no money, and adds, "Such as I have give I thee." What had he ? We should have expected him to preach to the man about the character, the work, the death, the resurrection of Christ, and then, if he understood and believed all this, to heal him as an attestation of the truth of the doctrine, and of the effect of faith in it. He does preach of Christ ; but his preaching is, as he says himself, the bestowal of a gift, the very gift which the man wanted. He had been always a cripple. He was bidden in the name of Jesus Christ to rise up and walk. The apostle believes that the King of whom he has spoken to the Jews is this man's King. He believes that He has power over the limbs of this man. He believes that He is the life-giver. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth he restores him to the natural, regular, healthy state of a human being. It is not because the man believes something about Christ that he is re-

warded with this unspeakable blessing. His faith is called forth by the word of the apostle, by the name of Christ. He receives strength from Him who is the giver of strength. He receives faith from Him who is the Author of faith.

“And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”

If we only went so far in the narrative; if we stopped where the story of the miracle stops, we should still, I think, be obliged to ask ourselves, Is this my notion of a miracle? Do I mean just this when I speak of the powers, and signs, and wonders which were wrought by the apostles in the name of Christ? Do I regard them as direct attestations of the power and presence of One who is the King and Lord of men, the giver of life and health to men, the enemy of disorder, irregularity, disease, death? Or do I only regard them as witnesses to the fact that a certain man was born in Palestine at a certain time, who is entitled to be called a Messiah or the founder of a religion? And do I think their force as witnesses lies in the fact of their being irregular, unusual,—in fact departures from the method according to which God governs His world? These questions bring one's opinions and judgments to the law and the testimony; and we may be sure that if they are not according to the word there is no light in them.

But we cannot stop at this point. We must hear what the historian tells us of the effect which this miracle produced on the minds of his countrymen; we

must hear what effect St. Peter wished that it should produce on them. The actual impression on the multitude is described in these verses :—

“ And all the people saw him walking and praising God : and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.”

What could be more satisfactory ? If miracle means wonder, must not the apostles have been delighted that wonder had been the result of their miracle ? Attention was fixed upon them, poor Galilæans as they were. It was seen that they could do things which grander men could not do. Would not they be sure to make converts ? Would not the three thousand that had been gathered into the Church be multiplied tenfold or a hundredfold ? So those would conclude who think that in the rarity, and the suddenness, and the novelty of these acts lay the demonstration that they had a supernatural character ; so those would conclude who say that the Church flourished in its early days because it was able to exhibit these wonders, and has been weak in its later days because it has been unable to exhibit them.

But what says the apostle ? I have taken his words for my text, because they seem to me to contain the key to the whole chapter, because in them the very spirit of the Christian Church comes forth.

“ And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or

why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ? ”

It is not a satisfaction to him that he has made them marvel at an unusual event. Still less would he have them think that he and his fellow-apostle had any strange charm by which they could accomplish cures which other men could not accomplish. It fills him with dismay, not with pleasure, that people are looking earnestly on them, are attributing to them any rare merit or special faculty. And mark to what he would transfer their astonishment, where he says the power which has been manifested in this case is dwelling.

“ The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.”

With what emphasis he leads them from the momentary to the enduring, the permanent ! You wonder at this cure because it has a novel appearance. Nay, wonder at Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ! Wonder at Him who made Himself known to the poor Mesopotamian shepherd as he was keeping his flocks, and bade him go forth to find a home for his descendants ! Wonder at Him who was with Isaac when he went out at sunset to meet Rebecca coming with his camels from the far land ! Wonder at Him who caused Jacob to wake up from his stone couch in the desert and say, How dreadful is this place ! He was here, and I knew it not ! Wonder at Him who has watched over your fathers, who has been with them in all their wanderings, who calleth the stars by their names and has known men by their names, has been with them in their troubles, bore Himself their sicknesses ! Wonder

at Him who taught men from ancient times that there was One at His right hand, an only begotten Son, who should reign till all His enemies were made His footstool, who promised your ancestors that He would raise One to reign over them, who should be one of their brethren, and of whose kingdom there should be no end! Wonder at Him who has glorified His only begotten Son, who indeed became your brother, and "whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." You gave up this King into the hands of the Romans. You forced them to condemn Him. You said that you had no king but Caesar. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you." The language is not conciliatory; the severer for its truth. But it is necessary to the apostle's purpose. He cannot set forth the King whom it is his purpose and work to set forth without bringing all these facts fully before their consciences. "And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead." He has spoken of Jesus before as the Holy One and the Just—the perfect man who fully revealed the Holy and Just God. Now he uses an expression which bears directly upon the sight before them. He is the "Prince of Life," the source of all life to the bodies and spirits of men, the conqueror of death.

"And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." Here, under the disadvantage of what I must think an inadequate translation—inadequate in conveying the sense of how

entirely the faith was owing to the name—you can yet perceive that the power is attributed directly and simply to Him whom the God of their fathers had raised from the dead ; how this man is taken merely as an instance and proof that He is the Prince of Life.

The next words establish this interpretation. “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.” The people were ignorant, their rulers were ignorant, that they were crucifying the Prince of Life. They did not know that they were seeking to kill Him from whom all that was not death in them had come. But the promise that God would show the Prince of Life to be the Redeemer of men from that which had been their misery and plague, He had accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What I have wished you to observe is, that in all this discourse—if sacred words are as we believe honest words, and not deceitful words—St. Peter has been turning the minds of his countrymen from that kind of marvelling which was the natural and immediate result of an unwonted exhibition of kingly power, to the ground of all such cures, and of all cures whatever of human ills—through whatever agency they are wrought, and whether the process is rapid or slow. Those who are the slaves of nature—who worship gods in nature—must be partly fatalists. They must suppose that the diseases which afflict them come from a divine power, and therefore that it is only half right to resist them. The help against this comes from the sudden intervention of benevolent powers that are on

their side, or from their success in persuading the avenging deities not to gratify their wrath. Those who believe, like the Mahometans, in a God who is only a sovereign, who is in no relation to His creatures, are consistent fatalists. What comes they are to receive, whether it is in the shape of a blessing or a curse. Those who believe in an actual Son of God, who, when He was upon earth, showed forth the mind and will of God by healing sickness and casting out devils, must suppose that sickness, disease, death, are anomalies—interruptions of the right and divine order of the world, with which they are not to fight less vigorously because they are natural ; on the contrary, which they shall have supernatural help in combating. But such a belief as this, so contrary to the indolence, the cowardice, or the superstition to which men are all prone, could not have been sustained merely by the news that Christ, in those years when He was seen among men, was curing leprosies, fevers, palsies. Those acts might have been regarded as mere exceptions, evidences of His character and mission. The cures which the apostles wrought after His ascension were proof that there was nothing in the circumstances of His earthly life which affected the principle of His acts. What He had been, that He would be always—the Prince of Life ; the restorer of health to some in this world, as a pledge of that final restoration of health to body, soul, and spirit which He has promised hereafter. That impression, therefore, which the miracle-workers in different ages have tried to create—the impression that they were doing something marvellous and unusual ; that they had some power or holiness in themselves—is the one which

St. Peter would by all means discourage. He was laying a ground, I apprehend, the only true ground, for the toil and the hope of the scientific man, the faithful physician, who scorns charms and seeks for principles and the right way of applying principles, in all times to come. He would work in the undoubting faith that the Lord and King of men has triumphed over all that we call the natural ills of men, and that he may, in simple dependence on His grace and power, do his utmost to discover what helps against those ills are to be found in the resources of creation and in the vital powers of the body itself, possibly in the heart and spirit which direct the movements of the body.

If I had any doubt that this was the meaning of the apostle, the doubt would be removed by that truly wonderful passage—more wonderful than the cure of any man lame from his birth—which winds up his discourse.

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold

of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

My friends, I do not pretend that I can interpret these words; God, I believe, will interpret them to us if we will wait humbly upon Him. Perhaps He may interpret them to some of us in ways we do not dream of —through tribulations, personal, national, and ecclesiastical, that we shrink from contemplating. Perhaps those who are engaged in healing the bodily sicknesses of their fellow-men may be taught to feel the force of them as keenly as we who are called physicians of the soul. For those who are surrounded continually by all the sights of human misery, and feel how much, yet how little, they can do towards relieving it, may dwell with unspeakable delight upon that "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." I beseech them not to be checked in that contemplation and in all those hopes—the fortifying hopes—which it awakens, by any theories of ours, or which they suppose to be ours. Let them believe that the apostles are wiser than we are, and that Christ is wiser and more loving than the apostles, and that the mind of Christ is the mind of the Eternal God. So they will learn to see what comfort there is, if we believe that the prophet who was raised up to the Jews of their brethren was indeed the Eternal Son of the Father. So they will see that the Jews were cut off

for not believing the prophet Jeremiah,¹ because they would not believe in One in whom all the families of the earth as well as their own were to be blessed. So they will see that when we call upon our countrymen and contemporaries, and upon ourselves, to repent of that unbelief and be converted from it, we are not limiting the grace of God or doubting that it will be manifested to all, but denouncing the unwillingness of men to trust that grace for themselves and the universe. So they will see that it is not our faith, or our opinion or worth, which heals our bodies or spirits and makes us acceptable to God ; but our faith must be in Him in whom God hath declared Himself well pleased—in the Eternal Prince of Life ; He it is who makes the lame walk and the weak strong, He it is who kindles the faith in human hearts, He it is who is to confer a higher blessing upon us than even that which was conferred upon the man at the gate of the Temple, when He turns every one of us from our iniquities.

¹ See chapters iii. 17 to v. 14 ; xxiii. 5, 6 ; xxxiii. 16, etc.

V.

(Date missing.)

“ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”
—Acts iv. 18-20.

THE third and fourth chapters of this book were the lessons for last Friday—St Peter's Day. There are none which illustrate the life and position of the apostle better. I propose to take the second of them for our subject this afternoon. It is clear from the opening of the chapter that the Sadducees were now the ascendant party in the Jewish Sanhedrin ; the High Priest and his family were of this sect. In the gospels we hear much more of the Pharisees than of the Sadducees. They regarded our Lord's acts with most suspicion ; His severest words were directed against them. The charges of breaking the Sabbath day, of eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, of blasphemously pretending to forgive sins, must have proceeded mainly from them. It was their righteousness which the disciples were told they must exceed if they would enter into the kingdom of

heaven. They were the whitened sepulchres that appeared fair on the outside, but within were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. It is true that when our Lord came up to Jerusalem there was a combination of the two sects against Him, and that Caiaphas, who condemned Him, was a Sadducee. It is true that He sometimes joined them in His warnings. The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees is said to be hypocrisy. Still, on the whole, the religious sect—the sect which thought itself righteous and despised others—was the one which came most directly into collision with the Son of Man whilst He dwelt upon earth; whilst those who denied any resurrection, who disliked the thought of any communion between the visible and the invisible world, who merely rested on the maxims of the law as forming a good system of morals, were the persecutors of His disciples.

Why, it may be asked, should the Sadducees persecute? They were not fanatics; they had the greatest dread of enthusiasm; they attached a comparatively slight importance to religious observances or to mere doctrines. Whatever explanation we may offer of the fact, we cannot gainsay it. The actual Sadducees of Jerusalem clearly did persecute, not only at this time, but in those later times of which the Jewish historian speaks. Men like the Sadducees, like them in their denials, like them in their hatred of spiritual excesses, like them in their pretension to a calm, sober morality, have persecuted and persecuted bitterly in later times: for they have said to themselves, 'Men with strong convictions, with a fervent belief, are disturbers of the peace. Mere opinions

entertained quietly, of course we tolerate. Let all sects and schools keep their own. But if any fancy that they have a message to deliver which concerns us all—if they set it forth as a divine message, if they address it to the common people—let them do it at their peril. For the sake of our own comfort, and the comfort of society, we will put them down.' Upon these principles a Sadducee can crush the expression of thoughts without any compunction, and with a sense of his own consistency. I suspect, my friends, that a firm and deep belief in a loving God who has redeemed the world by His Son, who teaches men by His Spirit, will be found at last a more effectual protection for the liberty of human thought than any other. We dare not interfere to check inquiries which we think He may have aroused, to stifle doubts which we think He can satisfy.

The motives to this persecution are stated by St. Luke. "Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus (or in Jesus) the resurrection from the dead." The teaching the people as if they were capable of understanding such subjects—if the effect upon them could be anything but to stir their blood and make them disaffected to their regular masters—this was one offence. The proclaiming not a doctrine of resurrection—to that they were well used—but in Jesus the fact of a resurrection and the principle that Jesus had claimed a risen life for men—that was the other. Those who committed such outrages were not to be argued with like the members of a recognised legitimate sect. "They laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide." It was a measure of precaution;

merely an attempt to stop the spread of an infection ; what punishment might be advisable they would consider afterwards. Possibly the mere display of official grandeur might be sufficient to awe ignorant Galilæans who had never seen a Sanhedrim of doctors, who must have grown up in the belief that the High Priest was the most wonderful and awful of all human beings.

“ And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” A very imposing spectacle ; to devout children of Abraham more imposing than all the Conscript Fathers of the Roman Senate would have been.

“ And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ?” As the question proceeded from Sadducees, we may presume that the object was to terrify the apostles into a confession of some trick which they had practised in the case of the lame man. Still they may have been glad to suggest the thought that some demoniac agency, such as the Pharisees would at once have suspected, had been at work ; that the name and power of the Prince of Darkness had been invoked for the cure.

“ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom

ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

St. Peter is said to be full of the Holy Ghost when he spoke these words. But no marvellous sign accompanies them. He needs no new tongue to make himself intelligible to the doctors of his land. How is this gift manifested? We all feel it is manifested. The apostle, cowardly by nature, unable to face the accusation of a maid-servant when his Master was on His trial, becomes endued with a rare boldness; can look them in the face whom he would be inclined to fear most, and who apparently have both the inclination and the means to do him mischief. This boldness is the effect of an inspiration. But did the apostle mean to claim such inspirations only for himself? Did St. Luke claim them only for him or for that age? Assuredly not. In this, as in all cases, St. Peter is bearing witness whence all intellectual, whence all moral gifts proceed. Whoever, as I have often told you, has any faculty of speech—any faculty of acquiring language—should refer that to a divine source, should ask that it may receive a divine direction. Whoever, in any difficult circumstances, knows that he has need of valour to encounter the powers of men, should be sure that that valour is not his own, but that he may ask it, that it will be given him according to his need; he, like St. Peter, may look to be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man.

The words which he uttered under this guidance are the simplest and manliest that could have been chosen. Of them also I may affirm that they are universal words, that by their very nature they cannot be confined to any period. The apostle, indeed, addresses himself to the Sanhedrim ; he speaks of an act which has been done under their eyes ; he speaks of a crime which they have committed. But he refers this cure to the Author of all cures—to One who has proved life to be stronger than death, for all as well as Himself. The impotent man stands whole before them, because the all-powerful King and Deliverer has given him perfect soundness. That King and Deliverer is not one whom they can boast of as the Head of their society. He is the corner-stone of the nation—the corner-stone of all nations. The apostles can boldly say that all salvation of every kind, bodily or spiritual, is to be found in Him, and only in Him. I am afraid that those great and glorious words do not always convey the impression to our minds which they must have conveyed to the mind of St. Peter. A man dwelling in a land of sects and schools, a man who was himself a kind of outcast—a mere fisherman of Galilee—had found the common friend, the Redeemer of doctors and peasants. He could point all to Him. He could say, He is raised above all principalities and powers that He may fill all things. There is no heart which may not turn to Him. It is He whom all are craving for. They will find their needs satisfied only in Him. The burdens upon their spirit will only fall off when they have recognized Him. Yet many of us have come to give the language *this* sense:—All who have not heard the name of

Christ, all who have not learnt or received the Gospel message, are necessarily cut off; for them there is no hope. So we turn the birth, and death, and resurrection of our Lord into a cause for despondency; we suppose that the world at large might have had less misery if He had not come to redeem it. Oh, how these thoughts often haunt good and true minds! how they perplex all their feelings about Christ, all their wishes that He shall be revealed in His glory! It seems as if salvation had indeed come to mean something the very reverse of that which it ought to mean—as if the Saviour assumed the attributes of the Destroyer. My friends, let us turn to Him for salvation from these very conceptions which are so dis honourable to Him, and so utterly dark. Let us be assured that He is actually what the Scriptures declare Him to be; and that, if He is, times, and places, and circumstances cannot interfere with the exercise of His power, the accomplishment of His purposes. It is our privilege to set Him forth to all heathen as their Saviour from the false gods who have degraded and destroyed their morality, as the Revealer of the living and true God. Oh, let us not confound Him with their gods; let us not, through a terrible conceit of our own privileges and advantages, deny Him to be the Prince of all the kings of the earth, the Saviour of the ends of the world!

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men” (mere private men holding no office as well as possessing no school lore), “they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been

with Jesus." It was the only explanation. By some way or other these untaught, illiterate men that had followed Jesus and taken in the words that came from His lips were able to see further into the heart of things than the doctors ; they had a power of discerning, a power of helping others to discern, which the book teachers and the repeaters of the traditions of the elders had never acquired. And they were also able to give forth their words as if they were possessed by them, and as if they desired that other men should be possessed by them. There was no hesitation ; yet there was no claim to know anything which all other men might not know, and were not interested to know. These were signs that they had been with Jesus.

The apostle had eagerly and vehemently disclaimed the notion that they had any charm for curing diseases, that it was by their own power and holiness they had made the man to walk. They were simply witnesses of a power and holiness which were for all men, which all men might inherit together. The Sadducees felt this to be so. They would have rejoiced that St. Peter should have put forth some pretensions of his own. It was this name, this common name, this name of One who was not to be seen on earth, that worried and tormented them. Ordinary cases of enthusiasm they had seen and could deal with ; this was extraordinary. The men, instead of catching at fame, refused it ; instead of drawing the affections of the people to themselves, drew it away from themselves.

" And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." They might work what cures they could, proclaim a new sect

of Nazarenes if they liked, but let not the name of Prince, Saviour, Son of Man, be heard. There was danger in that. The sects, in whatever else they might differ, agreed in disliking that.

“ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” It was a strange answer. The High Priest and the Sanhedrim represented the majesty of the law, the divine authority upon earth. And these fishermen put it to them, whether they were not bound to disobey their decision, whether they should not be committing a sin if they did not disobey it. And this was addressed to Sadducees, to men who habitually disbelieved in every communication from God to men, who thought that all knowledge of His will must come through the letters of a book. And yet St. Peter and St. John could say to these men, Whether it is right to do this, judge ye. For every man, let his formal opinions be what they may, has in his inmost heart a witness that it is possible to hearken to God, possible to know His will. The driest doctors and casuists are still men, and can understand when a plain man tells them that there is a right and a wrong which doctors and casuists did not create and cannot change, and that he, for his part, means to do the right and decline the wrong, knowing that the Lord of heaven and earth has prompted that determination, and will be with him in the profession of it. And so these words spoken that day in Jerusalem have become sacred watchwords, to which men, who had powers civil and ecclesiastical against them, have turned for com-

fort, which they have dared to claim for their own use. No doubt they are words capable of abuse, words which we may make our excuse for self-will and the indulgence of our individual fancies. But we shall not avoid that abuse by the false and dangerous modesty of assuming that they are not recorded as examples to us, that there was something in St. Peter and St. John which took them out of the circle of humanity. If we steadfastly believe that we are not to hearken to men more than to God, we shall be taught to listen with more real respect and deference to men than we ever did before ; we shall ask God, and not in vain, to distinguish between His commands and our conceits ; we shall dread these more than the opinions and the authorities which influence us most. These Galilæans had been taught by a severe experience to distrust themselves, their own wisdom and their own virtue, before they could fearlessly call upon the Judge of all to witness that they were serving Him, and were speaking only the things which they had seen and heard.

The punishment was deferred. “ And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is : Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed,

both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

The prayer is full of fire, and yet how calm it is! 'Lord God of heaven, and earth, and sea, Thou hast made all things, Thou preservest them in their order as in the days when Thou didst look upon them and say that all was very good; and Thou dost not overlook the noise and tumults of men, the rage of kings and nations. Thou hast ordained in the midst of them, as David said of old, as Lord an Anointed King over Thy hosts, a Son reigning over these noisy tyrants, these wild rebels. And we know the name of that King whom Thy old servants spoke of. Thou hast shown Him to us. We know Him as Thy holy child Jesus. And we have seen with our own eyes how the battle that was in the days of old has reached its fiercest rage now; how the servants of the Cæsar, how the High Priest and rulers of Israel, the heathens and Jews, have been gathered together against Him. And we have seen how Thou who sittest in heaven hast laughed them to scorn; how they have only accomplished Thy own wonderful purpose. And now that Thou hast exalted Him to Thy right hand, see how determined they are to cast off His government and to establish their own tyranny. We, the poorest and weakest of all, are the witnesses for Him, and see how they threaten us; but, oh strengthen us to defy their

threatenings ! Send us forth not as avengers, but as healers. Make it manifest that Thou art that which Thy Son proved Thee to be by His works on earth, the Lord and Giver of Life.' Yes, those are the signs and wonders which they desire to do that they may testify of Christ. They who once would have called fire from heaven to destroy the village of the Samaritans now ask that they may make it known to their countrymen whom they are serving by stretching out the hand to heal. For now His Spirit has taken possession of them, the Spirit of power and love and a sound mind, the Spirit who imparts strength to the timid, the Spirit who opens the lips of the dumb. And this, too, is the Spirit of unity, the Spirit that denounces strifes and selfishness, the Spirit that binds societies into one.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." If we pass to the next chapter we shall see what dangers threatened the infant Church—what terrible hypocrisy—from the notion that this community of goods was demanded by the apostles, or by the custom and opinion of the society. We are taught, in the very outset of ecclesiastical history, what would come of establishing rules in one age or country to bind men of a different age and a different country. The apostles fell into no such confusion between the eternal and temporary. The impulse which led to the sale of goods was one which might be good for the moment, and which might soon need to be checked. The Spirit who prompted that impulse would abide

for ever, surmounting the judgment of all present teachers, of all traditions. He would in all ages and nations teach men that that which they separately possessed was not their own, but a trust from God. He would teach them that their best inheritance was that which they must have in common. The sun, the light, the air—these are common gifts. The sacrifice of Christ, this must be claimed for all if it is claimed for any. The righteousness, truth, love, in which He will be revealed, we must expect for the universe if we expect it for ourselves. My friends, we want the one heart and one soul now as much as in those first days. When shall we begin earnestly to ask for them ?

VI.

[This Sermon is wanting.]

VII.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

(8th December, 1861.)

“ And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.—Acts v. 38, 39.

THIS was the counsel of Gamaliel, the great doctor of the Pharisees. This party was now to all appearance in the minority, at least among the rulers of the Sanhedrim. The Sadducees were determined to crush the apostles, expressly because they taught in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Gamaliel might agree with them in thinking our Lord an impostor; he might join more fervently than they did in the denunciation of Him as a blasphemer; but he might reflect that if he allowed the other party to put down the disciples of Jesus on this ground, they would afterwards boast that they had condemned the doctrine of a resurrection, as the Pharisees professed it. The people would not draw nice distinctions ; they would say that the Jewish Sanhedrim had been entirely converted to the belief of the Sadducees. I think that neither the words of Gamaliel nor the few facts which

we know of him permit us to offer a much higher explanation of his conduct than this. Saul of Tarsus, who was brought up at his feet, who had learned his lessons, and belonged to his sect, cannot have understood him to mean that the persecution of the Nazarenes was in itself unlawful or unwise. No doubt circumstances which occurred afterwards, and which the next chapter will bring before us, may have given the Christian doctrine a new and more alarming aspect; stronger measures may have seemed, both to the pupil and the master, needful for the counteraction of it. But if Gamaliel had been very strongly possessed with the feeling which the text expresses, if he had thought that the decision might be safely left in the hands of God, a little of that conviction must, one would suppose, have been communicated to the most diligent and devout of his hearers. It sounds, therefore, like one of those weighty sayings which often fall from the lips of men whose opinions are *not* in the ascendant. These sayings are by no means insincere; those who utter them feel them to be true; they admire themselves for being able to announce maxims so grand and so useful; though, when their position is changed, and they are called to act, they may take a course inconsistent with their professions.

Words, however, are mighty things. Once gone forth, they cease to be the property of him from whom they have proceeded. By them he must be justified; by them he must be condemned. But their worth does not depend on the motives which urged him to speak them, or upon the meaning which he perceived in them. If they are merely frivolous, they pass away and are lost among all the idle sounds of which the

air is full ; if they have substance and strength in them, they may live for generations, and prove their force in each by the events which it brings forth. If they are only aphorisms of prudence—yet prudence dwells with wisdom—prudence, like wisdom, comes by the inspiration of the Almighty. Gamaliel tells us why he thought it was prudent to refrain from the apostles and let them alone. He had known many cases, in the course of his experience, of similar excitements which had passed away. He could name at least two, which many of his hearers would remember. “ Before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.” That supposed Messiah had vanished ; that kingdom which was to fulfil the prophecies of a divine kingdom had been forgotten. The next instance was still more in point. It applied to the very country from which these disciples of Jesus came. “ After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing”—just at the time when the sense of the Roman yoke was keenest, when every household was reminded of it by the demand for tribute—“ he also perished ; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.” What precedents were these for expecting a speedy dissolution of this new society ? for hoping that their dreams of a divine king were dreams which the morning dawn would put to flight ?

Gamaliel was, no doubt, well informed of all the acts which were attributed to the apostles. It was said that there had come a “ multitude out of the

cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folk, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." A Pharisee did not dispute the possibility of divine interferences. But he knew that such interferences were claimed by all persons who came preaching any remarkable doctrine or advocating any remarkable claims. And his law-giver had said expressly—"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." So that no mere reports of signs and wonders, however well attested, could convince him, or by the law of the Lord ought to have convinced him, unless there was a witness of quite another kind accompanying this. They might be miracles to draw wise people from the true God, to draw them into a false worship. Every Jew was bound to ask himself whether they were. If he was convinced in his conscience that they were the work of God, the law of the Almighty forbade him to heed the miracle, or to care for any evidence that seemed to establish it. If this were all, the disciples of the new faith might be scattered and come to nought, just as the disciples of Theudas and Judas had been.

It was reported also that a miraculous deliverance had been wrought in favour of those men themselves. It was said that the "high priest" had risen

up, “and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth.” It was said that when in the morning the “officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned” to the High Priest and the council, “saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within”; and that presently one came “and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.” A Pharisee believed in the power of angels to open prison doors; he might be more disposed to credit any report of the kind where Sadducees had been the authors of the imprisonment. Still so many of such deliverances were continually recorded of notorious impostures, that he must have had some conviction of the worth of the captives and of their doctrine before he could have been seriously affected by this rumour.

Another scene he had witnessed himself which must, I conceive, have impressed him far more. It is described in these words:—

“Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach

in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Gamaliel saw the faces of the Galilæans who spoke these words; he must have perceived with what thorough conviction they were spoken. These men actually believed that the Crucified Man was the King of the whole earth. They could tell the High Priest that He was his king. They could talk of His giving the High Priest and the Sanhedrim repentance and forgiveness. They might be self-deceivers, they might be deceiving them. But clearly punishment was not likely to have much power with them. If they were put to death, as the Sadducees in the council proposed, others would appear to maintain their heresy.

So he came to the resolution, which was expressed in the memorable words: "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." 'If it is a poor, feeble, worthless thing, why should we be afraid of it? What will your persecutions do but keep it alive, but give people a sense that there is something in it which you say there is not? But if it is *not* a feeble, worthless thing, if it has a divine power on its side, what good

will you do then ? Your labours are in that case perilous as well as contemptible. Your battle is with the Almighty.'

A grand position, I think, my friends, by whomsoever it were taken up, for whatever end, for however short a time. A test which will endure the roughest treatment, which will stand good for and against all persons and all beliefs, in all times and all places ; which, if we heartily receive it, will save us from a number of cowardly, faithless, cruel acts ; which will give us assurance when we are most excited by the fears of others or by our own. You will perceive that it was not only the Pharisee doctor of the law who adopted these maxims. The apostles appealed to them in the very discourse which led him to deliver his opinion. They did not think, any more than he did, that men were to receive their message because they had healed the sick or been brought out of prison. They accepted the power of healing the sick as a sign that a living and gracious King was reigning over the spirits and bodies of men. They accepted their deliverance as a sign that it is He who at all times breaks the iron bars asunder and sets the captives free. But they turned not to those acts, but to the Author of those acts for the proof of their veracity. "We are his witnesses of these things ; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." To that Spirit, who had been promised to abide with the Church always, who was to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, of judgment, they committed their cause. Not incidents peculiar to their age would have power to kindle or determine the faith of men. One who is, and was, and is to

come, One who knows the hearts of all men, could alone awaken this faith in any society or generation of men, in any single heart.

Let us consider for a minute or two each branch of this great assertion, which thus carries with it the double authority of old worldly experience and of young, fresh, divine trust.

1. "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought." That is to say, Whatever doctrine, whatever society, is merely of human invention, is merely an artificial thing; though it may look ever so well outwardly, though it may attract ever so much favour to itself for a time, it will perish at last; it has no root. So Gamaliel said, applying his words fairly, applying them to the teaching of the apostles. His own sect was to furnish an early verification of his words. "Every plant," said our Lord, speaking of that Pharisaical sect, "which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." The Pharisaic school was earnest enough. It had cultivated religious feelings and devout practices among the Jewish people. But it was a "counsel" and "work of men." It was a device of men to prop up a belief in God. It had therefore of necessity degenerated more and more. What was true in it grew more and more feeble. What was selfish, insincere, persecuting in it, became more and more rampant. It wanted no help from without to destroy it. It was perishing within. "Let them alone" was the divine precept. The work and counsel could not stand. They were earthly, not heavenly; of man and not of God.

I refer to this example, not only because it so closely concerns the person who delivered the sentence, but because I believe the same lesson has been repeated through all the history of Christendom. Sects, schools, orders, have been again established in the Christian Church. They have been established generally by earnest and devout men, conscious of some great task which has been forgotten, of some great duty which has been neglected, eager to assert the one and perform the other. They have flourished; they have drawn proselytes and devotees to them, for the truth and the duty have been felt to be divine. But the counsel and the work were of men; therefore, the strength of the society decayed often as its outward prosperity increased; at last it came utterly to nought. And this has not merely been proved to be the case in every section of the Church. Men dreamed that the whole Church needed some human hand to bind it together, and keep it from falling to pieces. It was a most promising invention. One can scarcely tell when it began; the thought of a Father upon earth grew so naturally; there was so much to justify it in the circumstances of the different nations; it secured such a homage to a divine and spiritual power. But it was a counsel and work of men. And see whether past history does not prepare us, whether the history of the world around us is not preparing us, to accept the assertion of Gamaliel, that it must come to nought? If so, we may understand also how true the inference was which he drew from his observation. All those sects, orders, schools, tried to suppress other sects, orders, schools. This great hierarchy thought it was set in the world specially to extinguish

all who disputed its decrees. It could not be otherwise. What is the counsel and work of men will always seek to extinguish something else which is also of the counsel and work of men. They cannot trust God either with their own protection or with the judgment of their neighbours. They must protect themselves ; they must judge their neighbours. And they are doing a vain thing. They are either trying to kill what will die of itself, or they are trying to kill what will not die, what cannot die, let them strike it as hard as they will.

For the second proposition is as true as the first. “ But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” Like many men, Gamaliel had a very imperfect sense of the tremendous extent and depth of his own language. To fight against God! To try our hands against His who created the heavens and stretched them out! And yet this is certainly what every one is doing who, in his own heart or in his neighbour’s heart, or in society at large, fights against a truth ; who wishes that it should not be, or that it should not come forth and make itself known. Every such person is carrying on with arms which God has committed to him, spiritual or secular, a warfare against Him. We may well tremble to speak of such a conflict, and how far more should we tremble to engage in it! We have indeed multitudes to keep us in countenance. Sanhedrim, emperors, popes, sects of all kinds, all have tried their strength in this way. All have tried whether they were not strong enough to put out some light, to quench some truth, but they have never been able to do it. The words have stood out in clear handwriting on the

walls of palaces. They have been read often by the light of the fires in which the bodies of martyrs were perishing. "If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it." No! nothing that is of God, however it may be mixed with that which is the counsel and work of man, has been ever or shall be ever overthrown. It maintains its own inconsumable nature, its own eternal life in the midst of that which is perishing; the moths which eat that away, the rust which corrupts it, cannot reach the substance within. We who believe that the God of Truth is our Father, that Jesus Christ His Son is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that the Spirit of the Father and the Son is the Spirit of Truth, we are bound to fear nothing for the truth, but to fear everything from our own timidity in professing what we feel and know to be truth, from our cowardice in searching for it, from our want of reverence for that which has been revealed to our brethren. We who know that the Gospel was strongest when it was persecuted, has always become maimed, debased, reduced to dead form by those who have persecuted in its name, should feel that we are fighting against God and His Christ and yielding to a subtle temptation of the evil spirit, whenever, under any pretext, we try to compel men or bribe men to think as we think. We who know how easy it is to worship our own opinions, our own selves, should always be asking the Living God to preserve us from that horrible atheism, and to keep us trusting in Him and Him only. And the more we "refrain from" those who differ from us, "and let them alone," so far as outward punishments and restraints are concerned, the more shall we desire by the manifestation of the truth to commend ourselves to every man's

conscience in the sight of God; the more shall we learn that there is a divine Spirit, witnessing to their spirit of truths which we can only utter in broken, feeble words, which we do but most imperfectly apprehend. And then that book for which men have blessed God to-day will become always dearer to us to-morrow, will show us ever more of the oneness of the divine purpose, more of the variety of the divine methods; because we shall not try to confine it by our rules and measures, because we shall learn from it patience to bear with other men's infirmities and our own, patience to wait till all that is merely man's counsel and work shall come to nought, because we shall draw from it hope to expect that day when Christ shall have subdued all His enemies, and there shall be no more fighting against God.

VIII.

(Date missing.)

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”—Acts vi. 1.

SO then, it will be said, the peace and love of this infant community are already at an end. They lasted as long as it was small, as long as it was in the fervour of its first emotions. The moment it expanded, the old grudges returned ; feelings of tribe and race appeared in a society which was built upon the union of tribes and races ; there were the same suspicions, caused too by the vulgarest earthly considerations, in this spiritual commonwealth as elsewhere.

Certainly, these thoughts are suggested by the sacred historian himself ; we are meant to dwell upon them, to connect them with the rest of the story, to see what lies in them that may minister to our despondency or to our hope.

Did we expect to hear of a model society composed of men who were unlike other men, or who became, by a sudden process, unlike other men ? Such a

society would be no fit beginning of the Church of God upon this earth. According to the doctrine of the apostles, God had exalted His Son to be the King over men. All were His subjects. All were invited to own themselves as His subjects. Those who believed these words to be true claimed their places in His kingdom. They submitted to the divine government. It was a government over their spirits. The uniting, loving Spirit of the Father and the Son, they were assured, would dwell with them, would work in them. There were signs that such a Spirit was dwelling with them and working in them. They were capable of a unity and fellowship which they had never known before ; they could live as if each had not an interest apart from the other, contrary to the other. It was a goodly spectacle, because it was the spectacle of men living according to their true law, of men living as if society were not a contradiction and a falsehood. That was all ; they were brought into no rare circumstances, they were taken into no regulated atmosphere. They were exposed to as many temptations as other men, to many temptations which other men did not know. They had all their old inclinations to be selfish, contentious, false. What they had learnt was, that these inclinations need not be obeyed ; that there was a power adequate to resist them ; that they might appeal to that power when the force of them was strongest. These were the principles upon which their society stood. If there had been any lucky accidents in their position which made them different from creatures of the same flesh and blood, these principles would have been contradicted. The

Acts of the Apostles would not be a book for our use and guidance. We might cast it aside as having no relation to us or interest for us.

The quarrel which arose now might well have staggered the apostles. The Greeks, or Hellenists, who were always numerous in Jerusalem, were not of different descent from the other Jews. They were children of Abraham. But they had dwelt in Greek cities; some had been born in those cities. They had acquired the Greek language, had engaged in trades which their countrymen at home shunned, had adopted many of the customs of those with whom they had mixed. It might have been supposed that the day of Pentecost had specially annihilated this difference; the sign of that day, if it went no further, surely signified that those who all owned David for their king and looked for a Son of David were one people, however places or dialects might divide them. And now even these could not agree. A question of charity brought out their differences, made them murmur against their pastors. The “widows” of the Hellenists “were neglected in the daily ministration.”

If the apostles had depended upon the tokens of affection which had appeared among their disciples—if they had fancied that these were the grounds of their fellowship—such an event must have overwhelmed them. They depended not on these, but on the Spirit of God who had produced them. They were well read in the records of the chosen people in the wilderness. They had heard of their murmurings. The story now came to life in their minds. They knew what it meant. And they saw that every

murmuring had been a step onwards in the divine manifestation, the discovery of some divine power, the source of some divine blessing. The manners of the people in the wilderness had been the lesson books in which they had learnt what they were and what their Deliverer was.

And so they found out the principle—mighty for past times, for that time, for all times to come—that calamities, humiliations, even sins occurring in the history of a society or of an individual, are crises out of which the greatest evil or the greatest good may come. Simply in themselves the effect of them will be irritating, depressing, hardening. Submitted to the Spirit of all good, they may be awaking, purifying, strengthening. It is so with each of us. Every mortification, as its name imparts, has a deathly quality; it may kill the spirit within us. Taken as discipline, it may kill something in us which has weakened our spirit. It is so with a nation. The loss of a helpful, wise man, a counsellor and a guide to the land and its ruler, is the loss of life-blood for a body which seems ill able to spare it. The loss may be felt in a lessening of heart and hope, in a diminution of interest for objects not connected with mere self-interest, in a more defiant, less humane tone towards foreign nations; or we may turn it into a reason for repentance that we have prized our blessings so little till they are taken from us. We now get a glimpse of such a Guide and Counsellor as no earthly one can be. The words, "I will be a husband to the widow, a father to the fatherless," will start for us into reality, and be felt to be indeed the deepest and most wonderful that were ever uttered. A stronger belief will be followed

by stronger sympathies. Life will come out of death ; for a people as for a man the grave will lose its victory. Either of these alternatives, the bad or the good, is possible. One is all too certain if we trust in any events, adverse or prosperous, to make us better, if we trust in ourselves to make use of the events. The other is equally certain if we understand that whatever befalls us is a message from God, and that His Spirit has a transmuting, regenerating power over the hardest natures; that “for brass” He can “bring gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron”; and that He can use all instruments, apparently the most unlikely, for His ends. “Out of the eater” can come “forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness.”

So was it with this dispute in the Jerusalem Church. Out of this event came the most remarkable development which had yet taken place in the organization of the Church, in its perception of its own functions, and of the distinction between one and another; in its vital energies, in its power to carry on its work as a universal society, a messenger to all nations. The following words will help us to understand two or three of these points :—“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

When I speak of a development in the organization of the Church, some may say, But is not that organization divine ? Could it be adapted to new exigencies ?

I apprehend, my friends, it could not have been divine if it had not been capable of adaptation to new exigencies. The apostles had been called out by Christ. They were witnesses of His dominion over them. They were witnesses that the chief of all had become the servant of all. They were witnesses, therefore, of a communion between earth and heaven, the visible and the invisible world. They were witnesses that because there was such a King and such a communion, it behoved the members of the Church to provide for each others' wants. In providing for these wants a difficulty had arisen. The apostles perceived that the task of attending regularly to the distribution of alms was not one they had leisure for. It was not that they despised the occupation at all. It was a very honourable one, only they had another which must be performed. If it were not performed the other would be neglected. There would be an end of outward charity if the relation between the Source of all charity and His children upon earth were forgotten. To maintain that relation, to keep them in mind of it, must be their primary business; the other might be committed to other hands. Not that it was mechanical, not that it could be done by drudges. The gifts must be administered by judicious men and by loving men. They must be full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom. They must be able to show forth Christ's mind in their treatment of the poor. They must be able to declare whose mind it was. As we shall see presently, they might be as much preachers as the apostles. The distinction of the higher function from the lower could not have been made at first. It would have suggested the thought that one was less

sacred than the other. Now, it was made because it was wanted. The capacity of recognizing distinctions, without making separations, is one of the signs of growth in a society or an individual. It cannot be produced by formal teaching. It is the effect of a practical education. Like all human faculties, it is awakened by the Divine Spirit working through outward occasions and necessities.

Moreover, what we call in modern language self-government was brought out by the same process. The apostles did not care to name those who should exercise the office of deacon. They called on the people to name them. They were to choose the men of good report, who should be set over this business. There was no claim of right on one side or the other. The apostles bade the disciples perform a duty. Every act was a ministry; every act was to be done in the sight of the Great Taskmaster. The haggling about the right to rule and the necessity of obedience comes at a time when the rule of the Chief Shepherd is forgotten, when His character and His work are equally misunderstood.

“And the saying pleased the whole multitude.” There was a sense that the right means of removing the difficulty had been discovered. Their confidence in the apostles increased; they could once more feel themselves one body. “And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.” I give you the names; they are important, for this reason. It seems to be agreed on all hands that a considerable proportion of them are the names of Hellenists; they

must have come from that section of the Church in which the murmuring had first arisen. Now, these Hellenists were, as we have seen, the link between the Hebrew nation and the Greek race; by kindred and belief they belonged to the first, by language, in some degree by civilization, to the other. Here was the first stage of that movement which was to carry the Church beyond the limits of Palestine, which was in time to bring it face to face with the heathen world. These men, who were appointed by the apostles to meet the outward wants of a section of the poor dwellers in Jerusalem, were to address themselves to some of the deepest inward wants of the wise and the foolish in all corners of the earth.

They go forth signed with the apostles' blessing. "When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." They are to feel that they are as much called by the Son of Man to their work as those who received their commission from Him when He was upon earth. His visible form cannot create any difference, unless the whole message which they were teaching was a false one. Effects followed this new appointment which we do not hear of on the day of Pentecost.

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." This last announcement is startling; we were not at all prepared to hear it. The priests are the last men to whom we should suppose the testimony of the crucified King could reach; if it did reach them, we need not wonder at the terror which was excited

among those who still regarded Him as a blasphemer. And this terror was evidently deepened and enlarged by the acts and the language of the new Hellenist preacher.

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” A clear and bright picture to rise up before us of that which passed in Jerusalem more than eighteen centuries ago. A man full of mighty conviction stands up before the Jewish people, and declares that One whom they had put to death, who had died on a cross, is the Son of God. He adds, apparently, other words to those. He speaks more boldly than the apostles had of that which will come upon the nation for having rejected this King. He looks at the Temple and says: ‘That is a grand building, but the days are at hand when not one stone of it is left upon another.’ He speaks of all the laws and customs which had prevailed in the land from the days of the prophets, and says: ‘All these have been very good; but if you rest upon them, or on your sacred books, against the living King, you will find that they profit you nothing.’ There is a synagogue in Jerusalem consisting of subtle men, who at Alexandria or in the Greek cities of Asia have mingled much Gentile wisdom with the traditions of the fathers, who cling, however, to the traditions, and try to defend them by the philosophy which they have got elsewhere. They

meet the young and vehement preacher. They argue with him. They overwhelm him with the learning of the Rabbis and the learning of the Greek schools. He simply answers them by repeating his message, 'This is the King who was promised to your fathers. This is the King of kings and Lord of lords—of Him your sacred books are speaking; of Him the Spirit of God is bearing witness in your hearts.' This was, I apprehend, the kind of wisdom and power which they could not resist; the wisdom and power of a man possessed and constrained by that which he felt that the beggars of his land, and of all lands, had as much right to hear as he had. If he had argued, the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians, the Cilicians and Alexandrians would soon have crushed him. He declared what he felt and believed. That was too strong for them.

"Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God."

It would not be difficult to find those who would say this, and who would believe, as much as they had the power to believe anything, that they were saying what was true. No doubt they had heard him speaking such words as I have supposed about Moses; they may have heard him say that even the law of the commandments, which were delivered at Sinai, would not raise them here out of sin; nay, that they who had it might be worse sinners than they who were without it. Did not this sound like blasphemy of Him from whom the Law proceeded? Was it at all difficult to give the words that construction? And if there were such charges

afloat, is the result which is given as their outcome wonderful ?

“ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him and brought him to the council.”

The Sanhedrim had been stilled by Gamaliel’s counsel when there had been a proposal to kill the apostles. But this was a new offender, one more audacious in his language, one who was exercising a tremendous influence, not only over the ignorant people who knew not the law, but over the priests. Possibly Gamaliel would not have thought it safe or desirable to save him. There is no reason to suppose that his accusers were Sadducees. They probably belonged to quite a different school. They were evidently zealous on behalf of those traditions and that worship which the Sadducees were suspected of regarding with indifference. For this was their accusation : they “ set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law : for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.”

No such complaint had been made of the previous teachers. They had preached to the Jews the resurrection of the dead, but they had been seen to frequent the Temple more regularly than other Jews. They had spoken of Christ fulfilling the law and the prophets, not of His changing anything. Some words then must have dropped from Stephen intimating that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles might some day be broken down, that there might be one flock and one Shepherd in all the earth. He

might hardly be aware himself how much his words imported — they might have a wider and deeper application than he knew—but they came from his inmost heart ; they went to other hearts ; they roused wrath where they did not find acceptance. How much more he reverenced the faith of his nation than they who accused him, how much more he reverenced and loved the house of God, he will tell us in the next chapter ; he will tell us why he reverenced and loved them, what he saw in them which the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians did not see.

In the meantime there came another answer to their accusations, clearer and mightier than the most acute special pleading, or the clearest and lucidest statement in words could offer. The face of the man was illuminated, it glowed with the certainty and joy of a truth which had mastered him, and it swelled the eyes which were most inclined to turn from it with human tears. “ All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”

If such transfiguration came only for a few minutes to God’s witnesses on earth, we may remember that it was only for a few minutes that the face of the Son of Man did shine as the sun. Such visions are prophecies of what shall be, when He appears in His glory, and when the vile body of those whose nature He has borne shall be redeemed, and made like to His glorious body.

IX.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

(29th December, 1861.)

“And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”—Acts vii. 56.

THIS chapter has already been brought before us in the services of this week. I think it is possible that you may have read it now and on former occasions, with a certain disappointment. The first martyr is standing before his judges. What an occasion for a grand defence; if not of himself, of the cause for which he is to suffer! Why does he go over the facts of a history, with which all who heard him must have been familiar? Why does he dwell even upon minute unessential points in that history? If his voice was to sound through all ages, is it not still more strange that he should have confined himself to the records of his own nation? that he did not appeal to more general human sympathies? Can this be the man who we are told was full of the Holy Ghost, and whose wisdom and power his adversaries could not resist?

My friends! I suppose such questions may have presented themselves to your minds, for they have

presented themselves to mine. I am very thankful for having been led to consider them. In reflecting upon them, I have learnt a little of what our Lord meant when He commanded His disciples, when they were brought before rulers and councils, not to take thought beforehand what they should answer or say ; what was the force of His promise : "It shall be given you in that hour what ye ought to say, for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you."

Stephen was full of ardour, penetrated by a belief which he longed to make all men partakers of. Men of this kind naturally turn away from historical details. They are eager to address themselves to present circumstances ; they tell what has been most mighty in storming or convincing their own hearts. If they do allude to events that have passed in former times, such men probably endeavour, by the aid of ingenious allegories, to show how they bear upon their own special subjects. Allegories were much valued in the Jewish schools. The Sanhedrim would have listened to them. They were also in popular use. A preacher to the crowd would have used them as convenient machines of his rhetoric. Again, Stephen was the subject of an accusation which he felt to be unjust. To repel it by arguments or allegations of his loyalty to his country's faith must have been his first and strongest impulse. But he leaves the present for the past. He adheres to plain narratives, introducing no allegories or types ; he entirely forgets himself. It was an unusual course, surely. Naturally no one would have adopted it. Let me try to show you what divine wisdom was in it ; how far more useful the speech

of St. Stephen was and is, because he did not follow the guidance of his own wit or judgment.

He was accused of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and the Temple. Moses was at once a proud name and a fearful name to the Israelites of that day. He spoke to them out of a book. His name represented to them the distinction of Israelites from Egyptians and the thunders of Sinai. They believed in God, because Moses in the Pentateuch told them to believe in Him. The Temple was again a proud and a fearful place to the Jews. It marked the difference of their worship from all other worship. Though it was haunted with the sellers of sheep and oxen and with money-changers, it was recorded to have received a solemn consecration, the divine glory was said in the holy books to have filled it; a shadow of that glory rested upon it still. How does St. Stephen speak of Moses? He does not begin with him. He goes back to an older, a not less sacred name. The God of their fathers had called Abraham. He was dwelling in Charran, in his father's house. He comes with his wife and his servants into that very land wherein they dwelt. He begets a son. He has a grandson and great grandsons. Strange! Those figures in a book have become actual men. They travel, they dwell in tents, they hunger, they commit sins. And these are the men to whom God speaks, whom He has called. Observe how he is repeating all little incidents that bring you face to face with these persons, in their own land and when they go down into Egypt, three score and fifteen souls. It is not art or rhetorical calculation. He is simply telling the story as he has read it and felt it. But his simplicity has all

the effect of consummate art. Those forms which had become mere memories to the members of the Sanhedrim, breathe, live, speak. And God lives, God speaks. These men are called by Him, governed by Him, He is with them, He is guiding them. From generation to generation those shepherds, in this their good and evil, are His witnesses, are carrying His purpose towards its accomplishment.

This personal character might perhaps be preserved in the patriarchal records. Will it last in the new period ? when we have come into Egypt, when the people have multiplied, when they are to become a nation ? Can it be applied to the great legislator ? Moses is born, he is an exceedingly fair child. He must be exposed on the Nile. His mother watches him. Pharaoh's daughter sees him and takes him home. He grows up in the court and learns the wisdom of the Egyptians. He feels for his suffering brethren. He kills an Egyptian. He tries to set the Israelites at one. He finds they do not understand that he is to be their deliverer. He flees out of Egypt. He dwells in Midian. He begets two sons. What a difference between this man, so living, so human, and the abstract Moses, the object of distant unreal reverence ! But this man, this patriot, sufferer, exile, father, while he is keeping his flock in the desert, sees the bush burning with fire ; he turns aside to see the sight. God speaks to him, declares that He cares for His people and has heard their cry, and sends him forth as a deliverer.

Is there anything new in this narrative ? Surely not. It is what every Jewish child knew. But it is just what Sanhedrim need to be told, because they have ceased to be little children, because they fancy

they have a profound lore which divides them from little children. They acknowledge all the letters of the divine book. They can count them exactly. They are sacred letters, every one of them. There are deep cabalistical meanings in them. They are oracles. The men who uttered them were inspired by God. But it is all letter. These inspired men are nothing to these priests and rulers. He whom they trusted in when they lived, fought, died, is nothing. The awful figures on stones before which Egyptians bowed had more which spoke of personal existence than these petrified words. To St. Stephen all were full of flesh and blood ; fresh as on the first day they were spoken. For he believed in a God who was, and is, and is to come ; and he believed in a Son of Man who bound all these men together, from whom all their strength and grace came.

Adhering strictly to the letter of the narrative, never altering it merely to point a moral, St. Stephen reminds them how that Moses, whom they put forth as the representative of the Jewish greatness and glory, had been treated by Israelites in his own day ; how an Israelite had demanded who made him a ruler and a judge over them ; and how the same question, asked first in Egypt, was repeated again and again, not by one, but by numbers, when he was leading them to the promised land. He traces this rebellion to its root. Their hearts turned back again to Egypt. They would not acknowledge the human ruler who was their deliverer. They would not believe in God as their deliverer. He reminds them that the oracles which Moses gave them are lively

oracles, not dead as they look to them ; that they had been told of an angel of the covenant who was the unseen guide of the Lawgiver. He uses the Hellenistic name of Ecclesia, which was beginning to be so dear to the followers of Jesus, to describe the chosen people in the wilderness. He reminds them that Moses had spoken of a prophet who should be raised up to them of their brethren like to him. He traces their first calf-worship, and all their subsequent idolatries, to unbelief in a God who is a deliverer. He reminds them that the prophet has announced captivity as the consequence of that idolatry and that unbelief.

So he has disposed of the first charge, that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against the Law. He had answered it not formally—not as it bore upon him—but practically. He has laid bare the real cause of contempt of Moses and contempt of the Law in former days and in their day. His speech penetrated through the thick fold of formalism in which the doctors were wrapped. The face, which seemed to those who steadfastly beheld it like the face of an angel, looked into their faces and made them tremble.

And now he passes in the same spirit, and with keen effect, to the second count of the accusation. He had blasphemed the holy place. He begins with the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, the witness of an unseen God, a Living God, a Deliverer, the witness against all visible gods. He describes how that tabernacle was carried by Joshua into the land which he took from the Canaanites ; how it was preserved through the time of their judges, how David desired to change it into a permanent house;

how Solomon built the house. A witness surely, a precious witness, of an Everliving Being, of one who was holding fellowship with creatures. But what if it was made more than a witness? what if it was turned into a substitute for the Living God; into a denial of His communion with men? A prophet whom they reverenced should give the answer. He says: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? Or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"

Has the criminal said these things to propitiate his hearers, in hope of averting the sentence which they mean to pronounce against him? He has no such idle dream. He has been bearing testimony for the sacredness and continuousness of his country's history, for the divine ground of it, for the essentially human character of it, for the issue to which it must lead, if it has not been all a fable. He does not the least design to please his judges. That Spirit who speaks in him inspires him with these words, certainly the last that it was, in the ordinary sense of the word, prudent to use. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." Think of such words spoken in such a place. They were in the holy books. They had come burning from the lips of prophets

who had lived ages before, against the priests, and rulers, and people of their time. But their fire seemed to have been exhausted. They could be quoted, read, and commented on. Now they burn again. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears." "Ye who boast of your covenant, ye who despise others for not being in this covenant, it is ye who oppose yourselves to the God of Abraham and Moses; it is ye who will not hear His voice when He speaks to you, who will not allow Him to rule and purify your hearts. Yes! it is you, the chosen people of God, who murdered all the prophets of God who were sent to you in the old time. They were sent to tell your fathers of a perfectly righteous Lord and King who was reigning over them, from whom all the righteousness of man came, and who would be manifested one day; who would show forth the righteousness of God in the acts and words of men. That Righteous One has been manifested to you. You have refused Him as your sovereign. You have slain Him as a malefactor. I do not deny the worth and grandeur of your calling. I do not despise your law. I admit that you have received it through the angel of God. But you have not kept it."

"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." It was the effect of telling them their own history, of recalling to them that which they all knew and professed to believe. No such consequences would have followed if he had tried to show them that they were not God's chosen people, that they were not included in this covenant. Like all the old prophets, St.

Stephen pressed upon them the glory of their calling, the blessing which God had conferred on their whole nation, the truth that they, as much as their fore-fathers, were inheritors of this blessing. Their conscience responded to these truths. Their conscience witnessed that there was such a government for them, and that they had resisted it. The Holy Spirit had been speaking to them, was speaking to them then, and warning them that they had given themselves to a cruel, murderous spirit. The same cutting to the heart is attributed to the crowd at the feast of Pentecost. But *they* said: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" *These* "gnashed on him with their teeth."

As yet it was only anger and cruelty longing for a victim. There was nothing in his speech which could condemn him. Even his last words, if they were ever so galling to them, could not be said to contain any blasphemy against the Law or the Temple. "But he looked up stedfastly into heaven, . . . and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." When the Jewish Sanhedrim and the people heard these words, they believed that Stephen had spoken blasphemy. They rushed upon him with one accord. When we hear the words, we are wont to say that a rare and wonderful vision was vouchsafed to a witness of God. I do not object to that language, provided we give it its right force. A vision is not granted to a dying witness of God of something that is not true. If he has a privilege above others, it is the privilege of discerning that which is true more vividly, more intensely than he had discerned it

before, or than other men discern it. That such a choice gift was bestowed upon St. Stephen I truly believe ; and therefore I believe that the Collect for his day is right in asking that these same gifts be bestowed upon all who, in any age, are suffering for the truth. If I did not entertain that conviction, I should hold the Jews to have been right in their cry against St. Stephen. He was speaking the most terrible of all blasphemies, if he was not speaking the greatest of all truths. We shall find more and more that that is the alternative, that there is no other. If God is the Being whom the members of the Sanhedrim took Him to be, there can be no intercourse between Him and His creatures ; there can be no Son of Man in whom He knows men, and in whom men may draw nigh to Him. To think of such a person is, in that case, mere delusion, mere profaneness. And let us not forget it. A people surrounded with all divine privileges and warnings, —believing itself to be the most religious of all people, —despising all others as enemies of God, did come to think that this belief was a crime, for which any who entertained it and confessed it ought to be stoned. They came to this conclusion, because they thought themselves the most religious of all people, and despised others. That thought made it impossible for them to acknowledge a Son of Man ; impossible for them to think of this race of ours as a race which God cares for, which can have the image of His Son, which His Son can have come to redeem. Let us not forget that religious pride and self-sufficiency were the murderers of St. Stephen, as they had been the murderers of Jesus. But neither let us forget that

the calm faith in the Son of Man, the Head of all men, the Redeemer of all men, gave Stephen such a reverence for his country's history and oracles as none of his accusers possessed ; enabled him to honour the patriarchs, and Moses, and the prophets, and the Temple, as none of them who stoned him for blaspheming them honoured them. Let us not forget that his faith in the Son of Man made him the most earnest and patriotic of Israelites. Let us not forget that they enabled him to pray : "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Let us not forget that in this faith he fell asleep. The humblest man who holds fast that faith will be a witness for God in his life and his death. However it is appointed that he should fall asleep, he will rest in the Son of Man, he will awake in His likeness.

X.

(Date missing.)

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.”—Acts viii. 4, 5.

AN ordinary church historian would have paused to make many reflections on the stoning of Stephen. Luke has no time to moralize. His moral lies in the narrative itself. To record the effects of St. Stephen’s martyrdom was better than to collect his relics or celebrate his virtues. One of these effects we are told of at the beginning of this chapter. The Sanhedrim has tasted blood ; it desires more. “At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem.” There is a hope that it may be extinguished altogether, for its strength was in its cohesion. And now the members of it are “all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” And a new spirit is awakened against them. It is no longer a Sadducean opposition, such as we heard of, a dislike to the thought of a resurrection. A young Pharisee, thinking that the honour of his nation, the sacredness of its traditions, the very belief which the Sadducees have thrown off,

are assailed by such preachers as Stephen. He has mixed with Greeks, he knows how liable the Jews are to lose their own peculiarities through contact with them. This new heresy which threatens to break down all distinction must be stopped; he will throw his whole heart into the struggle. "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." A single champion with such a resolute purpose may do much. He will be sure to infect many more with his zeal. It must be all the more effectual, because Saul has come from the school of Gamaliel, who at one time thought toleration possible and desirable. The conduct of the scholar must have convinced the people that the grave and cautious master had seen cause to alter his opinion.

This is the first consequence. The other is expressed in the words I have just read to you. "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." The doctrine of the Hellenist deacon then is making way, faster than he dreamed of, faster than the apostles might even have desired. People beyond the limits of Judæa are told of the divine King; He is proclaimed to them as the King. Stephen saw that it must be so; his words about the holy place and the customs which Moses had delivered, though grossly misinterpreted, were evidently pointing in this direction. It could not be otherwise. The Son of David must first be announced as reigning over the house of David. But those who believed the dying words of Stephen, those who thought that he saw the Son of Man at the right hand of God, could not suppress that conviction wherever they went. The bonds of custom,

of prejudice, of national antipathy, were very strong ; but if this belief had taken real hold of their minds and hearts it must be stronger.

The first trial of it was to be made by another of those deacons, who seemed called into existence that they might fulfil the meaning of the day of Pentecost more than the twelve who represented the chosen tribes could fulfil it. The movement was gradual. Samaritans were half Jews ; but, on the other hand, there was a bitterer feeling in the pure Jews against them than against the heathens in whose cities they dwelt. They were regarded as schismatics and apostates ; the others only as exiles from the covenant and the divine mercy. Our Lord's parable of the good Samaritan—His remarks on the Samaritan leper who alone of the ten returned to give glory to God—His conversation with the woman at the well—must have shaken the notion of His disciples that they were proving their faith by scorning these neighbours. But an old prejudice does not fall easily ; the feeling within which opposes it must be confirmed by some outward event, before a man becomes convinced that it is divinely inspired. A Jew who believed in Jesus, when he found himself driven from Jerusalem, and entertained in Samaria, would accept that as the sign which he wanted. Philip preached Christ to the inhabitants of the heretic city.

That he preached Christ as the apostles had preached Him ; that he spoke of Him as the King who had overcome death, who had been exalted on high, through whom remission of sins was declared to all who had been anointed with the Holy Spirit, who came to baptize into the Holy Spirit, we cannot doubt.

But there were circumstances in the character and condition of the Samaritans which may have led Philip to dwell with particular emphasis upon this last characteristic of the divine Redeemer. The hard schools of the Jews, the Pharisee who worshipped the letter of the law and his own righteousness in teaching it, the Sadducee who worshipped its moral precepts, or his own wisdom in discerning between them and mere ritual observances, were comparatively little tempted to what we call enthusiasm. The Samaritan was peculiarly tempted to it. His mind was less shut up in formalities of one kind or another, was more prone to acknowledge spiritual influences of any kind. They who had no dealings with the Samaritans, who looked upon them as God's enemies and their own, would of course dwell upon these indications of their weakness and proneness to delusion. It could be shown by clear and satisfactory evidence that the delusions were often far from innocent; that they were mixed continually with moral corruptions, often with a proud contempt of the moral law. What could be more natural, more reasonable than to oppose them by repeated assertions of the sacredness of this moral law? Must not those who held fast to it be rejoicing in their own freedom from the dangers to which these dreamers about some mysterious agency that was not to be found in letters and books were exposed?

Philip did not come *in this way* to undermine the superstitions and evil practices of the Samaritans. He spoke of One who had bestowed a Spirit on men. He showed forth the power of this Spirit. "Unclean spirits," we are told, "crying with loud voice, came

out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed." I wish you carefully to observe this statement and the one that precedes it, that "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." No words may teach us better than these, if we take them in connection with those that follow, what was the purpose of our Lord's miracles, and of those which the apostles wrought after He ascended. It is clear that not only the attention which was paid to Philip, but the "great joy" which is said to have been "in that city," were owing to what the Samaritans saw as well as to what they heard. They did not, and could not, separate one from the other. The news of a great Deliverer was accompanied by tokens that He was a deliverer from torments of the mind and of the body, from the subjection of both to a tyranny which both were forced to confess.

And now consider the next passage. "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one; to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip,

and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

The opposition between the prophet of God and the enchanter or sorcerer began early in Jewish history. Pharaoh was surrounded by magicians. They had a knowledge of nature, that knowledge which may be used for honest purposes or for vile, to enlighten or to deceive. They used it to make the people afraid of them, to uphold the tyranny of the monarch. Moses, the witness for a God, the Lord of the whole earth, who cares for the oppressed, who is the deliverer of captives, claims the powers of nature for this God ; as His ministers bids the locusts cover the earth, the waters of the Nile become blood. The divine plagues are plagues upon the tyrant sent on behalf of the sufferer. They interpret the nature and purpose of God's chastisements upon nations ; they show that man is not the servant of visible things ; they protest against those who trifle with God's order and exalt themselves. Throughout the Old Testament we have a repetition of similar instances, always with the same moral. Elijah protesting against Ahab and the priests of Baal ; the prophet's heavy burdens against those who spoke smooth things to flatter the king, and who preached lies to deceive the people ; the Hebrew captives at the court of Babylon, amidst the hierarchy of soothsayers who were gathered about Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, were alike in different circumstances declaring that nature is the servant of a righteous God, that it does not bend to the craft of designing men, or obey the pleasure of self-willed sovereigns. All were declaring that a King of kings, whose purpose is to establish justice and truth, governs earth, air,

and sea. The New Testament opens with the manifestation of the same mind. The powers which the Son of Man exercises are powers for the redressing of evils, signs that the Most High God cares for the poorest of His creatures. They are confirmations of the great human faith, that man is nearer and dearer to God than all the things amongst which he is placed ; that he is meant to have a dominion over them ; that our Lord announced it as the distinction between Him and all false Christs that He did not come in His own name ; that He did not glorify Himself. He testified of the Father ; the Father who dwelt in Him did the works.

This Simon whom Philip encountered in Samaria exactly illustrated the words, "Giving out himself to be some great one." To establish that boast was his business. How much of actual knowledge, how much of belief in himself, how much of mere deception mingle in him or in any enchanter, no man may decide ; the discovery of such points must await the revelation of the great day. But there was the original death—the first lie—which is found in all men who come in their own name, who seek to build up a reputation for themselves. He found a people prepared for lies. The Samaritans, craving for divine power, but not knowing whom they worshipped, fancying any power to be divine which could do what they could not do, were likely enough to hail him as the great power of God. Like numbers of his class, he may have been startled at his own success. He may have assumed titles and honours which he had not dreamed of assuming till he saw how ready his hearers were to invest him with them. He may have

begun only as the popular conjurer; he may have grown into a divinity; and men would have continued to bow before him as a divinity, and he would have continued to think of himself as one, if he had only fallen in with those who mocked his spiritual pretensions. There came in his way one who spoke of a *Holy Spirit*, of a Spirit proceeding from the God of truth, of a Spirit who saves men from their own vanities, who makes them servants and children of God. This message the people believed. The name of Jesus Christ the crucified man, the Friend of publicans and sinners, was too mighty for them to withstand. The kingdom of Jesus Christ seemed to them a kingdom into which they had a right to enter. They owned Him as their King, and were baptized into His name. And Simon found this name and this kingdom stronger than all his sorceries. It was the greatest, the most victorious power he had yet witnessed. "He continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." They were the attraction to him; it was them he admired; to do such acts was his highest ambition.

But Philip had evidently not the power to communicate the art, whatever it was, which drew Simon's wonder to him. What was the art? How had he become possessed of it? After a time Simon thought he had discovered the secret. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord

Jesus.)" What did this coming of Peter and John import? The Jews and Samaritans had been divided; the apostles had, like the rest of their countrymen, recognized the division and participated in the feelings to which it gave rise. Now that Samaria had received the word of God, now that it had confessed Jesus to be the King, now that the wall of partition was broken down, they might come and claim these old enemies as part of their family, as members of the same body with themselves. But how was this fellowship to be realized? How were Jews and Samaritans in very deed to know that they were one? What sign would be given that God claimed the offshoot as well as the parent stem? They hoped that they might have the same sign which was vouchsafed on the day of Pentecost. They prayed that the Spirit would testify of the expansion of the Church as He had testified of its formation. The gift of tongues had not been a mere accidental outward token then. It had been the token of a Presence which bound together men of different dialects and customs into one. Might not they hope—were not they bound to expect—that this antipathy of races and faiths would be overcome in the same manner? Could they ever be blended into a united society, separated as they were by belief and habit, if it were not?

So then the words to the woman of Samaria had their fulfilment: "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in

truth." The Father had taught those who had sacrificed at Gerizim, and those who had sacrificed at Jerusalem, to worship Him. He had given them His Spirit of truth, that they might worship Him, together. He had given them that token of a common understanding and a common spirit, that they might know they were brothers, however they might differ in age, or stature, or comeliness.

But this prayer and laying on of hands presented themselves in quite a different light to Simon. These men from Jerusalem were evidently in possession of a power which they could impart to other men. They had some conjuring charm which he had not found out. He would like much to know what it was. These teachers from Jerusalem were evidently poor men ; his enchantments had been successful ; he would try whether he might not at once raise himself above Philip by entering into an arrangement with these to whom he looked up, and from whom probably his own skill was derived. So "he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter : for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Many legends have clustered about Simon. He has been reputed as the first heretic in the Church, the founder of one or of many schools of heretics.

He is reputed to have considered himself an emanation of God, to have been in league with an impure prophetess, to have again opposed St. Peter at Rome. But the popular instinct has judged rightly in connecting him, not with these stories, but with his offer of money, and with the apostle's terrible answer. The crime of Simon has acquired a very vague signification; legal quibbles have concealed its nature; its guilt sometimes appears to evaporate altogether. If we study this chapter, we may find that it means something very serious, which God will bring to light if it escapes altogether the eye and cognizance of men. Whatever other evils there were in Simon were gathered up in this; the root of his impostures and his criminality was this; if he was an apostate, this transaction discovered the cause of his apostasy. He had been a seeker of power, a worshipper of power. He had perceived spiritual power, power that acts upon the minds, hearts, and wills of men, to be the mightiest of all powers. He craved for that most; for that would glorify him both in the eyes of other men and his own. But the power that comes from God is a diffusive, life-giving power. Think of the air you breathe every moment. Think of the light that comes forth every moment from the source of light. These are the powers of God in the outward world. And that higher power which He exerts over men, which governs their hearts and spirits, is like these. It enters them to conquer in them whatever keeps them from union with their fellows, whatever in them is cold, dividing, and narrow. Here was the frightful contradiction which flashed upon St. Peter's mind,

which he had never seen in all its horror till that moment. This man would restrict the free gift of God, the quickening, expanding, self-destroying Spirit which He pours out liberally on His creatures. This man mixes money, the exclusive thing, that which one has and another wants, with that which is to bind all in one, which is for rich and poor, for high and low, together. This man really believes money to be the great power of all,—not something which God bestows as He pleases here and there,—and that which is mightier than God Himself; that which can command Him; that which is indeed the highest god. All this was implied in Simon's wish to buy the power which he saw that St. Peter was permitted to exercise, not in his own name, not for any goodness and capacity there was in him, but simply as the witness of the Father, who desires to bless all His children with the highest gifts that even He can bestow upon them. To have such a thought, was it not to be "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity"? was it not to be out of fellowship with God and man? was it not to be shut up in a dark prison of selfishness and falsehood?

And yet, brethren, it must be spoken openly—Simony in this sense, in this radical inward sense, is the poison which has been working in the Church from that day to this. It grows as it grew in him who is here set forth as the first sign and example of it. There is a desire for power in every man's heart, for power over his fellows. There is an infinite craving in man for an intercourse with the invisible world. God has planted it. The seekers for power and influence think they may traffic with it. By enchant-

ments, by trifling with natural powers, by prostituting spiritual gifts, they carry on their traffic. Crowds follow them. The yearning in them must have some satisfaction ; this is better than none. But men are awakened to the belief that there is an actual communion between earth and heaven, that God has spoken, and is speaking to man. They hear of His Holy Spirit, of the power by which He would rule over the heart. There is a response to this meaning as there was to the other. It is found to be the reality of which the other was the counterfeit. Yes, and the enchanter feels what others feel. ‘This is a power which is greater than mine ; I yield to it. But can I not use it ? Will it not serve my purposes ?’ Yes, Christians have found that they might trade with the belief that there is a Holy Spirit, a Spirit of truth, a heart-purifying, heart-regenerating Spirit, which He will renew in us day by day. And always when they have done so, this belief that the gift of God may be purchased with money, that money is the all-conquering divine power, has been discovered to be dwelling in them. It was the awful revelation of this simony in the hearts of the rulers of the Church, taking then the form of the sale of indulgences, which produced the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Forgiveness, it was seen, was in the highest sense the gift of God. Indulgence was a gift of the devil. It must have been his suggestion that they could buy such a gift of God. This is one instance ; there are multitudes more in earlier and later times, in all countries and in all religious communities. Nor is one of us, clergyman or layman, set free from the peril of this simony until he has got into his heart the lesson

of this chapter, till he has been convinced that the Holy Spirit wherewith we are sealed in our baptism, is a Spirit of truth, who works upon our will, heart, reason, to clear them of all insincerity and untruth, of frivolous and fruitless excitement, of covetousness and self-seeking ; that He must at last conquer all the evil in us and in the universe ; that He will yet destroy all the separations and hatreds of sects, schools, nations, and tongues, which, like the cheats of enchanters, like the horrible frauds of money-worshippers, proceed from the spirit of lies. This is the prayer which we should offer up at the altar when we come to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and to drink His blood.

XI.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

(12th January, 1862—Morning.)

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”—Acts viii. 29.

THE Gospel of the Son of God has been preached in Samaria; the Church of exclusive Jews has claimed those with whom they had no dealings as their brothers, because God has claimed them as His children. The next step in this movement is recorded in the verses which follow. It is no account of a great missionary adventure to proselytize a kingdom. It is simply the story of an interview between two men. It is not the less pregnant with meaning and instruction for that reason. It opens thus:—

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.” I spoke of a simple narrative. But this sentence, it will be said, takes us beyond the region of common life. It transports us into a miraculous age. Philip hears an angel speaking to him. He takes a certain road in obedience to the mysterious voice. Have you ever thought, my friends, how you

have been led at different moments of your lives to go in one direction rather than another, to abandon some purpose and to adopt another? Have you ever thought how much has sometimes depended on that resolution? What produced it? Whence did it come? You ascribe it to chance, to some special circumstance, to a sudden impulse, to a train of thoughts. It is better to use this language if it expresses most nearly what you mean. It would be wrong for you to talk of a messenger of good or of evil suggesting thoughts to you, awakening your impulses, if you do not think that such messengers exist, or that they have anything to do with you. But suppose a man like Philip, really believing in a Lord of man, taught from his infancy that He did communicate with His creatures, strengthened in that faith since he had come to think that this Lord had spoken by a Son,—would it have been false or unnatural for him to refer the first movement of a purpose which had led to great consequences in his life or the lives of other men to an angel of the Lord? He would have done just the same if he had been living in the nineteenth century; it would have been utterly impossible for him now, as then, to have referred any condition of his mind to chance, or to a mere circumstance. He would have supposed that he was worshipping chance, or worshipping circumstance, if he adopted such a notion; and that worship would have struck him as very foul idolatry. He did not say that he *saw* the angel; his faith in the invisible saved him from any such fancy, which would have been natural to a heathen. But impressions that led to great results, he believes, must have some source.

Those which led to good, and proved themselves to be good, he was satisfied had a good source. I do not perceive any want of simplicity in this. I fancy we might be all simple and true if we had the same conviction ; though I would much rather we entertained it silently, and brooded over it in our hearts, than that we were in a hurry to find expression for it in the Scriptures or anywhere else.

“ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.” The Septuagint translation of the Bible had been made under the auspices of one of the Greek monarchs of Egypt. The knowledge of it may not have extended beyond the wealthy and the cultivated ; but it had evidently made an impression, how wide and deep we cannot tell, upon many of them. The old idolatries were becoming incredible. Was there to be mere scepticism, no worship at all, no glimpse of the invisible ? The age was not prepared for that. It was longing for light of some kind. Enchanters and prognosticators, such as the one we heard of last Sunday, were never more sought after by men and women ; there were some who could not be satisfied with guesses, who longed for discoveries. The Jews appeared to be narrow and exclusive, to have strange ceremonies of their own, to be generally little better in their lives than other men. But they had old and venerable traditions ; some among them evidently believed with all their hearts in the unseen God to whom they did homage. These books spoke of Hin

in august and glorious language. They contained also a human history. They spoke of Him as above them, and yet not so far from them, as governing a nation, as caring for all that befel it. The children of Abraham seemed to regard themselves as apart from all nations. Yet they invited other men to join their services. They spoke of their great Temple in Jerusalem. They said that one day the law was to go forth from them over the whole earth. Some said that those who would come as proselytes of the gate might learn mysteries deeper than those which Egyptian or Greek priests boasted of. Such words had an attraction for some earnest—it would appear, also for many frivolous—spirits. The Minister of Candace belonged to the former class. He had gone up for some festival. He had joined in the ceremonies, but he was not content with them. The books must tell him what the ceremonies meant. He would spell out its letters if he could. The prophets were the interpreters of the law of God—of the mind of God. They spoke of what had been, and was, and was to be. He would go to them for illumination. To whom could he turn better than to Isaiah ? What lofty words he spoke of the High and Lofty One who inhabited eternity ! What visions he seemed to have of a King who was to reign over the earth, in whom all the nations were to trust ! Very mighty words, surely. But they were with others that were so different. What are these about some Sufferer ? They are very beautiful. But to whom can they point ? How they blend with words about a Conqueror coming with dyed garments from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of his strength !

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” The interpretation of the impulse which had forced him into that road is come. It is not any angel that is urging him. The Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit who had broken down the division of tribes and tongues at Pentecost, who had enabled him to fraternize with the Samaritans, is directing his heart and mind to this student of the Prophets. Brethren, if ever at any moment of our lives any one of us has been brought into real living fellowship with any fellow-man, if ever the hard crust of our natures has been broken through, if the tongue has been loosed, and we have been able to speak to him that which he wanted to hear, must it not have been the Spirit who bade Philip join himself to this chariot who has wrought that miracle for us?

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?” It sounds an abrupt question; but the Ethiopian nobleman was reading aloud the words as if he were asking earth and sky to give him the sense of them. And how often should we, in this far west, have been glad if some one would give us credit for the ignorance which we feel, and would ask us plainly, as Philip did, whether we are only repeating sounds, or whether some word is entering into our hearts and minds through the sounds! The African, at all events, seems to have been too eager for light to be angry with any man, however humble, who might bring it; he owned that he could not see the drift of what he was reading; he wanted help. And Philip rode with him while he repeated words which will be read

in the churches of this land next Sunday, which we hear every Good Friday :

“ The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth : In his humiliation his judgment was taken away : and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.” “ I pray thee,” asks the Ethiopian, “ of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other man ?” The honest student presumed that there were all the signs of a prophet in the description. The witness for truth, the unpopular, despised man, the victim of popular rage and violence, the patient martyr, was there. Did the representation answer to Isaiah, in the days of Manasseh ? did it describe some other prophet that had been or that was to be ? We are not told that Philip began his answer by saying, Isaiah does not speak this of himself, Isaiah does not speak this of some other man. Those were probably prevalent opinions in the Jewish schools. Negative statements—mere contradictions of existing interpretations — do not belong to evangelists and apostles. St. Luke says, “ Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” He could have begun as well from any other scripture, from those which set forth the King who was to reign in righteousness, from that which spoke of a Light that was to arise and shine in great darkness, and of which the glory was to fill the earth. If he began with the King he must come to the Sufferer. He must show that every true king, David, Hezekiah, Josiah, had been sufferers, had entered into the sorrow of their people, had exercised their might through

sympathy. The perfect King, the King in whom all graces meet, from whom those graces spring, must be in the fullest, completest sense a Sufferer. If he began from the Light which was to manifest the glory of the eternal God, he must explain that this transcendent glory could only come forth in humiliation, in the meek enduring of pain and death; that all glory was poor and contemptible in comparison with that which would bear these tests. But as his text and starting point was humiliation and shame, he could, beginning from that scripture, show that as the anguish of every prophet had been an anguish for his age and his people, as he had never been able to separate them from himself, as their ill-treatment of him, though felt with the intensest keenness, had been felt for their sakes more than for his own, so the perfect Prophet, the Prophet of prophets, must, in the most complete and absolute sense, bear the iniquities, the anguish, the death, of men. And then proceeding to the rest of the chapter, he would show what a complete triumph was said to come out of this complete humiliation, how the dying Prophet would prove Himself to be the King of all men, and the Conqueror of all the powers that bind men. Jesus then might be proclaimed to the Ethiopian as the fulfiller of all the prophet's visions, the divine Son who had humbled Himself to take man's nature that He might manifest God in that nature; as the despised and rejected Prophet of Nazareth, Him who was sentenced to die for blasphemy in calling Himself the Son of God, for treason in setting Himself up against the Caesar; as Him who in bearing sin had overcome sin, who in dying the death of the Cross had taken the sting out

of death, in going into the grave and into hell had made mockery of both ; who was the risen and ascended Advocate and Representative of men ; who had sent down His Spirit that men might know the true God, and might know and love each other.

That the Messiah was to be found in the Psalms and the Prophets the Ethiopian had no doubt heard when he went to Jerusalem to worship. In what psalm and what passage of prophecy He was to be found the proselyte may also have been told in various schools of the scribes. The teachers may even have informed him where the Messiah was to be born. They may have made guesses about the date of His appearance. And this they will have called interpreting prophecy, anticipating the fulfilment of prophecy. Only they never discovered what the Messiah was, what His relation to God must be, what His relation to man must be. A Jesus, they said, could not be the Christ ; for humiliation had nothing to do with a king. He could not be the Son of God ; for was not God infinitely powerful ? Could a man who laid down his life have a right to call God his Father ? have a right to say, I and My Father are One ? What a new revelation will this preaching of Philip have been to the mind ! How a living Person springs forth from the dead book ! And yet, when the light has fallen upon the book, how its different words will begin to give forth their exact and natural sense ! What little temptation he will have found to allegorize them, or explain them away ! How they would glow ! The whole history will have been the history of God's discovering or revelation of Himself in a Son of God and a Son of Man.

The treasurer of Candace had caught the clue to the labyrinth of this history. But what was more to him, he had caught the clue to the labyrinth of his own life. He might believe in this Jesus. He might claim Him as his Lord and his Friend.

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized ?” ‘ You have told me that that is the plain simple way of confessing this Jesus to be my King, and the King of the whole earth. You have told me that in Him only God owns us as members of His family. Why may I not make this confession ? Why may I not take my place in this family ? “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” He was not eager for a proselyte; he did not want to boast that he had made a great man a disciple. Did he mean what he said ? Did he understand that this was his Lord and Master? Philip entered into no examination of his feelings. “He answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” The evangelist wanted no more, dared not ask for more. “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him.”

Philip’s task was done. He had committed the Ethiopian to other and safer hands. The Master would watch over him, the servant needed not to interfere. “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” So it was then; so it is now. Certain men have certain lessons to teach

some fellow-creatures, some blessings to confer on them. When the service is accomplished they are caught away. Their work may be ended altogether on earth, or, as was the case with Philip, it is ended in that place to be resumed elsewhere. It would be well for us if we all understood this; if we were as ready as he was to do the work which the Great Shepherd sets us, be it great or little, as well convinced as he was that that Shepherd knows His sheep and knows who will be the best to take care of them in His name. Philip might have fancied that it was his business to travel into Ethiopia and preside over the formation of the Church there. It was not his business; if there was to be a church there, it would rise in due time; his disciple might be a better minister in it than he would be. If we believe in a Holy Spirit, we may commit our ways and thoughts to His guidance. We may ask Him that we may not be dull and sluggish in obeying His monitions; that we may not confound them with the whispers of our own vanity or impatience. The God who willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowlege of His truth will accomplish His purpose without us. If He allows us to be fellow-workers with Him, if he enables us to tell any of the great King and the great Sufferer, if He causes that words which fall from our lips should send any on their way rejoicing, though we see them no more, let us be very thankful for such mercy; let us ask that we may be kept from abusing it.

XII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

(19th January, 1862.)

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”—Acts ix. 1, 2.

PHILIP disappears from St. Luke's narrative as he disappeared from the Ethiopian whom he had baptized. We hear of him once again with his daughter at Cæsarea. But the work which gives him a place in this book is done. He has been an instrument in breaking down the first barrier between the Jew and the outlying nations. He has been fulfilling the message of the day of Pentecost. It is that work which explains the opening verse of this chapter.

Those who stoned Stephen had laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. The words of Stephen had evidently pointed to a time when the laws and customs of Moses might cease, when the Temple itself might fall. The King, not of Jews only, but of all nations, had come. The nation had rejected Him. As their fathers had put

to death the prophets, so had they put to death the Head of the prophets. As their fathers had resisted the Holy Ghost, so they were more directly and violently resisting Him.

It was a tremendous message. If some heard it with levity and indifference—satisfied that their houses, and lands, and religion, would last their time—not a few gnashed their teeth and ran upon the speaker with one accord. To Saul it spoke of the destruction of all that he held most precious. The traditions of his fathers were set at nought; the distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised was all but obliterated, soon might be obliterated altogether; the very name of the God of Abraham might be confounded with the gods of the nations. And by whom? By ignorant men and women, professing faith in a Galilæan, actually daring to describe him as a Son of God. Saul might have wished that he had been condemned for that blasphemy by the Sanhedrim, not delivered unto the Romans on another charge. He rejoiced to see his nation once more claiming—even at the risk of the interference of their Gentile rulers—their old privilege, assuming once more the power of inflicting capital punishment for a transgression of their own laws. He probably attributed the abandonment of that right, in our Lord's case, to Sadducean influence. The bitter dislike with which the Sadducees regarded the new doctrine might be used to force them into a less ignominious policy. So the young Pharisee goes to the High Priest, though he was of the opposite sect, “and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that

if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

No doubt it was a very bold assumption of power on the part of a religious ruler in a subject province. That he could persuade the High Priest to such a step is an instance of the dominion which a zealous, vehement man, with a distinct purpose, can acquire over men with a merely negative belief, whose only desire is to keep things quiet, and to put down whatever interrupts their ease. Saul's proposals could have had no natural attraction for Annas; most likely he hesitated long before he yielded to them. But then the new heresy—the Nazarene heresy—was the most disturbing force in that day. Perhaps nothing but some other enthusiasm, a degree less unreasonable, would counteract it. When the danger was becoming so serious the experiment might be made, the peril of it might be encountered. The Romans could be persuaded that they were crushing an internal heresy, which, if left alone, might prove injurious to their ascendancy. Such calculations have often been made by high priests since Annas and Caiaphas; the union of opposing parties for a little while, in the persecution of some common foe, is the result of them.

The reasonings and motives of the High Priest, however, are of very little importance to the history of mankind. The feelings and motives of the young man to whom he gave his commission are of the deepest interest. His mind was full—so his friend tells us—of threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. He was thoroughly persuaded

that these were the feelings which a child of Abraham ought to cherish towards heretics and apostates against the national faith, such as he counted these men to be. The more he cherished such feelings, the more truly he felt that he was a Jew, the more he believed that he should recommend himself to the favour of the Being whom he worshipped. For he did earnestly desire this favour. He would have given up his own life as well as the lives of any number of men to obtain it. And what hope was there of obtaining it? What vengeance might a God of vengeance not take of him if he failed to fulfil His demands, if he came short in anything that he was bidden to do? Somehow or other sacrifices must be found to conciliate this mighty Ruler. Were not human sacrifices likely to be the most precious and acceptable?

Jerusalem had been tolerably purged of the heresy. Only the twelve apostles remained to make an open profession of it there. But it was spreading into other cities. The contact of the Jews in these cities with heathens made it more perilous there than it would be in the capital. The synagogues had been set up to keep the Jews pure from infection, to be witnesses of the God of Abraham against other gods. If men and women of this way were found among the members of these synagogues, their very purpose would be destroyed; they would be instruments of breaking down the very distinctions which they were appointed to uphold. How necessary then to stifle the heresy in them! How desirable to show them that the High Priest of Jerusalem retained all his authority, that they were answerable for their opinions to him, that he could and would coerce them!

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” I give you the words of St. Luke. I have no others to substitute for them. All explanations of them and dilutions of them seem to me in the last degree poor and feeble. If they were written in our Bibles I should long for such an explanation as St. Luke’s to tell me what they meant, and what they had to do with the after history. Is this a story of the way in which a man, indifferent about religion, was led to become a religious man? Saul was not indifferent about religion: he cared for nothing else. He was on a religious mission. He was ready to give up everything for his religion. Is it the story of a man persuaded to abandon one religion and embrace another? Saul of Tarsus never abandoned the Jewish religion, if by that you mean his belief in the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; his belief in the I Am who spoke to Moses; his belief in the Word of God who spoke to the prophets; his belief in the holiness of the Jewish calling; his reverence for the worth and sacredness of the Jewish law; his hope in all the promises made to the Jewish nation. He never embraced the Christian religion, if by Christian religion you mean anything which interfered with this earlier faith, any new system of opinions which was to set aside the living history of the Old Testament. He did learn to believe that One had come in whom the covenant to Abraham, the law

to Moses, the hopes of the prophets were fulfilled ; One who could say, “Before Abraham was I Am”; One who could justify men from all things from which the law of Moses could not justify them ; One who was that King of whom the prophets spoke, the King in whom the Gentiles might trust. Supposing this were so, supposing this was the Person of whom, throughout his life, Saul of Tarsus was to testify, I cannot conceive how He should be revealed to him except as a Person, as a King actually reigning over men and over him ; as One who knew what he was doing, as One who could claim authority over him, as One whose authority he had been resisting. Think with yourselves how such a revelation could have come with power to the whole mind and spirit of such a man as Saul of Tarsus ; then read the actual accounts of St. Luke and of St. Paul himself of the way in which the revelation did come to him. After that you may read as many commentaries as you please, proceeding from one school or another, which take away from these narratives what they suppose to be their perplexing or supernatural element, and which reduce them into the record of a transaction into which no divine or supernatural power enters. See whether, in every one of those commentaries, you have not to ask yourselves, But where then *was* the power which actually changed the whole purpose and intent of this man’s life ? An argument may convince a man that one opinion is better than another opinion ; it may make a stout defender of one opinion of one who has been the stout defender of the opposite, at least if the argument blends with something which speaks to his affections or his interests as

well as to his understanding. But to make a man thoroughly believe that One whom he has denounced as an impostor and blasphemer is, and always has been, his King, the Lord of his life, to whom he owed homage when he was most struggling against Him ; to make a man believe that this suffering, dying King is actually the image of that God whom he had thought he was serving best, when he was most full of threatenings and slaughter ; to make a man believe that this God cares for those who had seemed to be outcasts from His favour, the objects of His vengeance ; to make a man act as if this were so, and spend his life in bearing witness of such a God to these outcasts, declaring that the Spirit of God alone enabled him to love them, or love any one, and to resist the hateful propensities of his nature ; to make a man show by his acts that such a Spirit of power, and love, and of a sound mind was in him,—this power, my brethren, does not lie in arguments. They who refer such a revolution to the power of arguments are more contradicting the reason and experience of men than the most credulous and superstitious have ever contradicted them.

For though I have said that St. Paul was not converted *from* the faith of his forefathers but rather *to* that faith, the conversion is a much more radical one than is expressed by the words, that he became a believer in Jesus of Nazareth. That might only mean that he believed a certain Man who appeared at a certain time on this earth of ours to be the Messiah, the great messenger of God. But in fact his whole idea of God Himself was changed. From that time he believed Him to be not only a different Being from the Being whom he had imagined, but the most op-

posite kind of Being possible to that. The belief in Jesus as the Son of God compelled him to reverse all his thoughts about the character, nature, and purposes of God. At the same time it changed all his thoughts about his own relation to God. Instead of recommending himself to God by one kind of service or another, the thought flashed upon him that he was a merely dependent creature, who could do nothing right, think nothing right, be nothing right apart from God ; who had been in fact displeasing Him most by those things by which he thought to please Him most, outraging His will by those acts which were meant to conciliate His good-will, setting up a cruel, hard, ferocious spirit against His loving and gracious Spirit. What could deserve more the name of a *conversion* than this ? And if it does deserve that name, to whom must we attribute it ? What could have imparted to a man another idea of God but God Himself ?

“ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” He confesses a Ruler ; one who has a right to tell him what he shall do ; one who can make him understand what he shall do. That any one should awaken to the perception of such a Ruler without trembling and astonishment, I hold to be impossible. But this man had all his life been reading of such a Ruler in the Scriptures ; he had heard how He spoke to prophets and holy men in the old time. Ever and anon, in lonely hours, in the watches of the night, he may have had intimations that such a Ruler was near him, about his bed and board, was speaking to him, was revealing the thoughts

and intents of his heart. But the vision will have departed. He might have gone back to the books ; he might have been told by the Scribes that in these latter days God only uttered Himself in them. By hard toil to work out their sense, availing himself of the traditions of the elders, was all he could hope for. And now this Ruler was coming forth out of the darkness, was compelling him to listen, was drawing forth his cry for guidance out of the depths of his heart. And how strange ! This Ruler was speaking to him as a man ; showing the heart of a man ; feeling for man as brother feels for brother. Yet what awe ! Surely He has the glory of God and the angels in Him. Saul bows and adores.

There is no pretence that Saul could discriminate or arrange these emotions ; he waits for light ; at present he is only crushed.

“ And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” Paul, in speaking to the Jews in the 22nd chapter of this book, says—“ And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” Those who seek for discrepancies find one here. I am afraid our habit of making the veracity of the Bible depend upon the absence of such discrepancies, leads people to be unnaturally eager to detect them. If we read the Bible with more simplicity, it would not strike us as very wonderful that in one account of the transaction men should be represented as hearing a voice but not seeing the person from whom the voice proceeded ; in another as seeing a great light, but not hearing what the person said from whom the illumination came. The same

fact is conveyed that the message reached Saul and did not reach them. Neither the sound nor the light was more than an accident of the vision. That, I conceive, is a very important point to be remembered. It may clear our minds of many perplexities, if we keep it steadily before us. In every great crisis of our lives there may be some attending circumstances—some mere outward phenomena—which arouse and startle us. The tendency of the frivolous and superstitious man is to take great account of these. They are for him the stupendous, supernatural part of the history. The man upon whom any great moral effect has been produced *cannot* hold that opinion. He *must* think the alteration that is produced in him immeasurably more important, more divine, than any impression which has been made upon his senses. But since everyone of us is disposed to dwell upon the visible rather than on the invisible, some visible signs are mercifully granted to assure us that the invisible power is real. Even good men are apt sometimes to lay stress upon these, though not without a certain shame and reluctance. And their less serious followers repeat them and force them upon us, so confusing men's minds and rousing in them all that craving for signs and wonders which our Lord declares to be the characteristic of a wicked and adulterous generation. The careful study of St. Paul's conversion ought to be very effectual in dispelling this habit of mind. We are told of the light and the sound. They are present, they have their office, but they are common to Saul with those whose minds undergo no change. It is the words which are addressed to the heart that cast down his pride and make him another man.

The same remark applies, not less strongly, to the following verses :—“ And Saul arose from the earth ; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man : but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” This influence of the mind upon the body is, I apprehend, just as real, just as much the result of laws which God has ordained, as the reciprocal influence, which all must confess, of the body upon the mind. The latter may be the more usual ; the former is, if we might venture to say so, the more regular and legitimate influence. I shall not object to call the one natural, the other supernatural ; but only for this reason, that I hold man to be a supernatural creature, one who is intended to exercise dominion over his own nature. When our thoughts, sad or joyful, affect the condition of our body, we have a witness that we are human ; when the condition of our body affects our thoughts, we have a witness that we are animals. Both are true witnesses : in our present state we could not part with either. Our bodies fall with our spirits ; our bodies are redeemed as well as our spirits.

“ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus : for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man,

how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." Is this anything more, some will ask, than the history of a strong impression which was made upon the mind of a certain Jew in Damascus, and of his struggle with that impression, and of the reason which finally decided him to follow it? I answer, as I answered last week, when I was speaking of the angel who told Philip to go down into the road from Jerusalem to Gaza—If you can tell me what impressions are, and what the struggles with impressions are, I shall know better whether I can interpret the Scripture's language by them. That they come to us, I am sure; whence they come, I should like to be sure. I want a Bible to help me on that point; if I find it does help me, I do not think I shall improve it by merely transferring to it the very puzzles which require to be solved. So long as I confess a Good Spirit, from whom all good thoughts and desires and just works proceed, and who can help me to distinguish between the bad and the good, so long I need not be the victim of impressions; I need not discard them. It is precisely this which I read of Ananias here. He had an impression strong and clear. He did not yield to it. But, if it came from the Unseen Teacher of his heart, he must not throw it aside as if it were nothing. He asks to have it sifted. The end is that he finds he has a work to do. He is to help a brother

to see clearly his way. He is to prepare him for his work. Ananias has a double lesson. He learns that the Guide of his spirit is watching over men whom he regards as his enemies, of whom he has reasonable or unreasonable suspicions. It might be a comfort to us sometimes to entertain that belief, a comfort to have our suspicions cured, a comfort to be sent on errands of mercy. Are you sure that any of our suspicions are cured, that we ever do go on errands of mercy unless there is some prompting of this kind? Are you sure that we should not be wiser and humbler if we referred the prompting to its true source?

“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.” All that light which was above the brightness of the sun, and the blindness, and the visit of

Ananias, have issued in this. He has found that Jesus is the Son of God—that He is very Christ. He can tell his countrymen that it is not a lie, not a heresy to believe that the poor man, the fellow-sufferer with men, the despised and rejected of men, is One with the Eternal God. That has become his inmost conviction, the life of his life. That he is certain is true for all human beings. It is not a truth which can stand apart from any one ; it is very nigh—sleeping, waking, at home or abroad, he carries it with him. No circumstances can affect it. All circumstances of joy or of sorrow may be means of revealing it. And yet Saul knows deeply, inwardly, how far this truth seemed to be from him ; what an effort and an agony he passed through before he could gain any grasp of it, how at last he only grasped it because it grasped him. He had fought against it long. He could fight no longer. God had opened his eyes to see that he could not exist if this Lord, this Son of God, were not sustaining his existence. God therefore Himself wished him, wished men to know of this Christ, wished them to know that He, the universal Lord, was not the dark, horrible being which they had formed to themselves out of their own sinful imaginations ; that He was what Jesus had manifested Him to be, that He was their Father. If his countrymen could believe this ! If they could believe that their fathers had not been deceived when they said that the Lord was a God in whom they might trust, to whom they might turn from their iniquities, yea, who was turning them from their iniquities ! If they could take the words of the book which they worshipped to be honest words ! If they could perceive that it spoke of a Living God who was with them

and was speaking to them, not only of one who had spoken ages before to men who were in their graves!

Such was the effect, the first effect of that conversion which we are to commemorate in this week. And all the other effects to which the Collect for the day alludes—the spreading the light of the Gospel among the nations, their conversion to the faith of Jesus—rest upon this, and are involved in it. St. Paul had nothing to proclaim to men but this, that the Lord, who had met with him by the way, who had conquered and claimed his spirit, was *the* Lord. He could have scattered no darkness from their minds if he could not have told them that in this Lord and no other they were to learn the nature of God. And he could have gone with no hope on his errand to one land or another, to Jews or to heathens, if he had thought that the God who had converted his mind and will from distrust to confidence, from darkness to light, had not the same mind towards them, was not seeking all lost sheep to bring them under the one Shepherd. He always refused to speak of his conversion as of a strange isolated event, to be remembered for its rarity. He was an example and pattern, he says, of the divine mercy and long-suffering. He believed that the same gracious power which could change the mind of the fierce zealot of Tarsus, who thought he was serving God by destroying man and trying to extinguish the light that was shining upon the earth, would draw men of the same temper in all generations to confess that they had utterly mistaken His character and purposes, to ask that He would turn them into ministers of that grace which Jesus had shown forth

on Calvary ; or could turn an utterly indifferent, reckless libertine out of a mad downward career to seek a righteous Deliverer, and to trust in Him. He believed that the same gracious power which acts upon the hearts of individuals can turn nations from darkness to light, and, what often seems harder to hope for, can keep them in the light, and can bring them back into it when they have wandered into dark selfish ways of their own.

The idea of conversion—that of God as the converter—was always present to the mind of St. Paul. And we need, dear brethren, that it should be always present to our minds. Do not suppose that there has been exaggeration in what any man or any school has said upon this subject. What has looked like excess has been really defect and hesitation. People have fixed upon moments in their lives when some great effect has been produced upon them, when a truth which they had been disregarding has flashed upon them, when they have yielded themselves to the service of good and not of evil. Could they speak too warmly of such moments ? Could they prize them too highly ? Only if the momentary was substituted for the permanent truth which was revealed in that moment, only if it was more thought of than the God who is present in that moment, and in every moment of our lives ; who is always fighting with us and for us against ourselves ; who is always speaking to our wills and drawing them out of their own ignorance and perverseness ; who would always be converting them to Himself. For we need a continual conversion to God, because there is an evil power near us, about us, always seeking to pervert us from Him.

The motion of a spirit is not the motion of a stone. If it be once stirred from its torpor, it requires to be continually quickened afresh. It is always ready to slumber again, to sink into a worse death than that out of which it has been saved.

And let us take two other lessons with us on this subject which St. Paul's story has taught us. The first is, to value outward signs and monitions as messages from God, not to look upon them only as the sounds and lights which led St. Paul to cry, 'Who art Thou, Lord, that art speaking to the heart within me ? what wouldst Thou have me to do ?' The power we are to want is one over our spirits. We may be sure that God would be always exerting it over them ; that visible things are worthless if they do not arouse us to confess His invisible presence.

The second lesson is this. We shall only be able to believe that God has converted our spirits to Himself, or that He is converting them, or that He will be converting them, if we assure ourselves that it is His will that all should be saved, and should come to the knowledge of His truth. We must know more of our own dulness, hardness, heartlessness than we can of the dulness, hardness, heartlessness of any one else. We must know that nothing but an infinite Love and Compassion has power to soften us or raise us. We cannot measure that Love and Compassion till we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He verily is the Christ. When we do believe that, we must expect a day when all things shall be put under His feet ; we must ask to be God's ministers in preparing the world for that day.

XIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

(2nd February, 1862.)

“ And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”—Acts ix. 26, 27, 28.

THE message which follows the narrative of Saul’s conversion is an epitome of his after life. He preaches at Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God. His countrymen seek to slay the apostate. He escapes from them. He finds himself at Jerusalem, naturally suspected by those whom he longed to claim as brethren. Barnabas, the son of consolation, trusts him, and makes others trust him. He begins to contend with the Hellenists, of whom he had known so much, who had been partakers with him in the death of Stephen. They, too, plot to kill him. He is sent back to the place of his birth. There, for a while, we lose sight of him. He needs rest ; those whom he had persecuted need rest. An

interval of it comes to both—the preparation for fresh efforts and fresh sufferings.

Then the historian goes back to St. Peter. Occasionally at Jerusalem, we hear of him chiefly as going to other towns, strengthening those of his countrymen who had confessed the name of Jesus and were united in it; giving evidences of His power which might reach those who denied it. He is at Lydda, where he testifies of Jesus as the Healer in raising Æneas from his sick bed; at Joppa, where he testifies of Jesus as the Preserver and Restorer of life, by calling back the spirit of Dorcas which had departed. The signs are recorded, not dwelt upon. They are given as instances of the might of that Word which is to restore all things, which all that are in their graves shall hear; not as startling exceptions from God's order, rather as vindications of it. In such acts, and in all his words, Simon Peter felt undoubtedly that he was fulfilling the function which his nation was called to fulfil. He was showing, as Moses and Elijah had shown, that the Lord God of Israel was the Lord God of health and life, the Deliverer of man, utterly unlike the gods of destruction, disorder, and tyranny that Pharaoh and Ahab worshipped. St. Peter was not less a witness for the promises to Israel because he declared that there had "come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse," that "a Branch" had grown "out of his roots": that "with righteousness" He was judging "the poor," and was reproving "with equity for the meek of the earth." Simon Peter was in all respects a Jew—a Jew in outward profession, a Jew in heart. Whatever works he may engage in hereafter, we may be sure they

will be only such works as he is convinced a Jew ought to undertake; only such as will illustrate the mission of the Jew, the covenant which God has made with his fathers.

Nevertheless, when we open the next chapter, we shall find St. Peter going to Cæsarea, on the summons of a Roman centurion, and preaching the Gospel to him. I do not mean to enter upon that story to-day. I wish rather to take the occasion of these two names of Peter and Paul occurring together in this passage, to consider what place they hold in this book which we call the *Acts of the Apostles*.

I said when I began my lectures that this title was not an accurate description of its contents. It speaks to us of only a few of the apostles; it records very few of their acts. These two, St. Peter and St. Paul, have more space given to them than all the rest together; yet we cannot imagine for a moment that we have a biography of either. St. Paul is not followed to his death; in the latter part of the narrative, St. Peter seems to be forgotten.

Like Stephen, like Philip, like every one else who occurs in St. Luke's history, these teachers are introduced simply as messengers of the kingdom of God to one set of men or another. Everything in their early years that has been necessary to prepare them for their work, we are told. In this point of view, their occupations, their temperaments, what they learnt or did not learn, is all important. No weakness or sin must be concealed that they may look more heroical; we must see them just as they were. Whatever events in their history do not concern the main business of the book are omitted; it is the record of God's doings, not of theirs.

Their journeying, preaching, imprisonment, we shall learn of in reference to this end; if we wish ever so much to know more for their own sake, the curiosity is not indulged.

We can scarcely conceive two men of the same race so unlike in all their circumstances. They have of course the common starting point. They are both, in a sense, Jews. But Simon Peter is a Galilæan; his years have been spent on the lakes. He hears a voice calling him from mending his nets; he follows Him from whom that voice comes. He walks with Jesus during His stay on earth. He hears the Sermon on the Mount. He is called to be one of the twelve. He sees his Master raising the daughter of Jairus. He sees His garments and His face becoming white and glistering. He sees that same face in the agony of the garden. He has declared that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. He has been told that flesh and blood have not revealed that to him, but the Father in heaven. He has taken Christ and rebuked Him, because He said He was to be rejected and crucified. He has heard the terrible words, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." He had been at the last supper. He had asked through John who the betrayer was to be. He had said that he would go with Him to prison and to death. He had denied with oaths that he knew the man. He had wept bitterly. He had gone to the sepulchre. He had been out on the water when One whom he knew to be the Crucified One beckoned him. The question had been put to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" The command had been

given him, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs." He had been told to follow Christ and not to trouble himself about what should happen to another disciple. He had seen the cloud opening and Jesus departing out of their sight. He had been in the upper room when the feast of Pentecost was come. He had begun to speak with tongues as the Spirit gave him utterance. He had in simple language told the men of Israel that the Jesus whom they had crucified was both Lord and Christ. He had called upon them to repent and be baptized. He had been the leading witness in the Church, to the Sanhedrim and to the people. He had detected and punished Ananias. He had defied the enchanter Simon in Samaria.

How entirely different had been the course of Saul during this time! No Galilæan, but a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a scorner of all irregular mixtures, all base blood. He has been born in no mean city, a city mixing Greek and Latin with Oriental culture. He has learned all the wisdom of the Rabbis. He has never seen the face of Jesus of Nazareth on earth. He has hated all who bear His name. Supposing that he has renounced that hatred and become the preacher of the faith which he once despised, would men so unlike in all their discipline, even in their mode of accepting the Gospel, ever assimilate? Must there not be a growing repulsion between them? Yes, my friends,—if the assertion of the book is a false one, if there is no God, shaping the ends of the most wilful, training them for His service,—one cannot conceive how Simon Peter and Saul should ever have understood each other. We should be forced then to accept the theory of those modern critics, who say we have only imagined an

agreement between them; that they were the leaders of hostile parties; that St. Luke was naturally of St. Paul's party, and that his narrative has been interpolated by those who wished to make a compromise between them or to exalt St. Peter. We must then suppose that the Corinthians were right in calling themselves, some after Cephas, some after Paul. We must take the passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, in which St. Paul says that he rebuked Peter at Antioch because he was to be blamed, as a conclusive proof that this enmity, which was commonly hidden, sometimes broke forth in open violence.

But consider again those contrasts which I enumerated. Is there nothing in the midst of them which is common to both men; common in the very root and principle of their lives? Simon Peter who walked with Jesus, as much as Saul who never knew Him after the flesh, revolted at the belief of a crucified King. Simon Peter was not saved by the sight of Christ, or by acquaintance with Him, from denying Him. His presumption and cowardice yielded only to a spiritual power. That same spiritual power acted upon Saul. Both were alike witnesses of an ascended Christ. Simon Peter did not know his Master till he had been parted from Him. They were alike in this too. Worshippers, as they thought, of the God of Abraham, they had both to learn that they had not really believed in the God of Abraham as their God, that they had considered Him chiefly as One who had spoken to their fathers, not as One who was speaking to them. Both had to learn that they could not look up to Him unless He were in very deed looking

down upon them, caring for them in their wanderings, seeking after them, bringing them home

These, my friends, are radical affinities such as no compromises could have produced, such as no dishonest interpretations could have imagined. A mighty Will brought the wills of these men into consent with it, therefore with each other, and that Will was the author of their differences as much as of their agreement. Their education had been His, their perceptions of truth were those which He had given them. What were they to do but to obey His guiding; to confess that they could see nothing but in His light, that they could do nothing but by the light that proceeded from Him? Those who are brought to these convictions must have a deep internal sympathy. They will recognize it most in action and suffering. They will not talk of it; they will assume it, and act upon it. They will have no dream that they can protect it against the powers of division within and without that are threatening it. God must protect it and them. Each must maintain, without hesitation, without remorse, that which he knows to be his position. He cannot abandon it to please or conciliate the man he respects most, to make what he does intelligible to him. Each will have allies or followers who will misunderstand and misrepresent the purposes of the other, and will do their best to set them at strife. With the wisest men—apostles no less than others—their slanderers and their flatterers may at times prevail. But in general,—always when they are yielding to the guidance of God's Spirit,—these apostles will give the answer which St. Paul gave to the Corinthian partizans—So far as you are adopting these names,

Cephasites or Paulites, so far are you "carnal and walk as men." Obeying that Spirit, each will turn upon his own faction as sharply as the apostle did—"Is Christ divided?" "Were ye baptized into the name of Paul?"

There will be times assuredly when that same Spirit will teach the man who is embarked in a great enterprise that his fellow-worker, out of some timidity, from deference to some old and venerable tradition, through slavery to the opinion of those about him, is sacrificing the very principle of the enterprise. Then he will rebuke him to his face—not as partizans are wont to do, behind his back—will show him plainly and openly that he is not asserting but violating his own maxims, putting the truth to which he is pledged in jeopardy. So did St. Paul to St. Peter at Antioch. He could not have done him a more signal service. He could not have given a more clear and decisive token of his love. Those in that day who preached "Christ of contention" will have rejoiced in the feud. Then critics, who contemplate it through the distance of centuries, may gloat over it with scarcely less satisfaction, as a proof how there was no real unity of spirit in one time or other. We may feel the same delight for a different cause. We may welcome it as a proof that spiritual unity exists most strongly, most securely, among those who have a truth which they will part with for no man, and who dare to speak it; that spiritual unity exists most strongly and most securely when the preacher to the circumcision and the preacher to the uncircumcision understand that they are called to distinct duties, and that they must pursue those duties in distinct, though never in contradictory, methods.

I have applied the names to these two teachers which St. Paul himself has applied. That they cannot be used without a limitation we shall soon learn. St. Peter brought the first Gentile into the fold of the Church. St. Paul was willing to be accursed for the sake of his kinsmen after the flesh. But they are true names notwithstanding. St. Peter wrote his epistles to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad in different parts of the East. Every epistle of St. Paul, except it be that to the Hebrews, and those to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, is addressed to a Gentile Church. The one was willing that the Gentiles should share the privileges of the commonwealth of Israel. The other sought to stir up to jealousy the children of the old covenant, by magnifying his office as the preacher of a gospel to the world. And therefore the one would adhere to the Law that he might witness for Him who had come to fulfil the Law, the other could be without the Law, if he might win them that are without the Law. Nothing, it seems to me, is more beautiful than these varieties—these oppositions, if you like to call them so—nothing has tended so much to the full development and exhibition of the truth. The parties in the Church would have set Paul above Cephas, or Cephas above Paul, or Apollos above both. The Head of the Church determined that it should have the aspect of truth which presented itself to Cephas, and to Paul, and to Apollos, that He might be manifested in its fulness; that all might be gathered up in Him.

And now, what lesson would I draw from this for you and me? It is this: We must for ever be

glorifying our own poor apprehensions, worshipping some little narrow opinion of ours which will grow narrower and smaller every day, which will at last live only by its animosity to some other opinion,—or we must confess that we are God's children and servants. We must believe that it is His purpose to spread light through His world. We must give ourselves to work with Him for that end. Then, whatever we are, our horizon will widen, our thoughts and hopes expand. The fisherman will catch men. The narrow Pharisee will be a witness for the redemption of mankind. And the thoughts of one, though formed and matured under a different sky, in a different atmosphere, will sustain and complete those of the other. All differences and distinctions will come out not less but more clearly in the unity which comprehends them. Each one will rejoice to contribute out of his little stock, and will be richer for the gift. Each will rejoice to learn of the other. The age of sects will pass away; the Christ age will begin. And God will accomplish this, though we cannot. He gave a pledge of it when He taught the disciples in Jerusalem to receive the man of whom they had been afraid, when He taught Peter and Paul to give to each other the right hand of fellowship, that one might go to the Jew and the other to the Gentile. He gives a pledge of it every time He invites us to celebrate the feast of His Son's sacrifice. If our notions of that feast are to be the measures of its worth or its power, we shall be famished indeed. But the feast has been a comfort to multitudes of the poor and suffering, while doctors have been debating about it. If our notions as to the sacrifice are to be the measures of its worth

and power, we must all perish. For it would seem, from our controversies about the death of Christ, as if we thought He died to separate us from our Father in heaven and from our brethren upon earth. But He died that we might be one with our Father in heaven and with our brethren on earth. And He will accomplish His purpose. In that faith let us eat and give thanks. Let us ask that as He was presented in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented pure of all hatred and selfishness, a Holy Church redeemed and glorified in Him.

XIV.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

(9th February, 1862.)

“Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation ; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”—Acts x. 28.

HOW essentially Jewish the mind of St. Peter was, how he was formed to be the apostle of the circumcision, I endeavoured to show you last Sunday. It was not the accident of his birth which stamped this character upon him. A Galilæan might easily have been tempted, by the contempt with which other Jews regarded him, to lose all sympathy with the race. But Jesus had preached to those who were on the Gentile border, had claimed them as lost sheep of the House of Israel. The fishermen had confessed Him who was brought up at Nazareth—Him who was called a Nazarene—as the Son of David, the King of the whole land. They had therefore the strongest divine call—the strongest human reason—to maintain their position. Though their Master had sprung from the tribe of Judah—though the apostles might readily, therefore, acknowledge the paramount dignity of that

tribe—they could not allow it to claim any especial privileges. Their numbers, their position, marked them out as witnesses to the twelve tribes wherever they might be dispersed. They were always to recognize a commonwealth of Israel. St. Peter had learnt this lesson thoroughly. The day of Pentecost had deepened instead of weakening it. That he never lost it his first epistle is an abundant testimony.

The events, therefore, which are recorded in this chapter derive a peculiar force from their connection with his name. He is not, however, the first figure which it brings before us.

“There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”

Remember, I beseech you, where these words occur. Remember that you are reading the New Testament. It is there that you find an officer of the Roman army, brought up in heathenism, yet ignorant of the name of Christ, called a devout or pious man. There you are told that he actually prayed to God. More is not said of him; more need not be said.

Some may think that Cornelius advanced by a negative course to the belief of One in whom he could trust, of whom he could ask help. They may suppose that he began with renouncing the Jupiter of the Capitol, or disclaiming his household gods. If St. Luke said so I should submit. As he gives no hint of the kind, I shall rather suppose that he was more, not less, reverent than other heathens, that whatever he could learn from his country’s traditions he did learn, that

God taught him through these, through his obedience as a soldier, through his care for the poor, to know Him; to see that true Lawgiver who was concealed beneath the Jupiter of the Capitol, the true Father whom the household gods were feebly hinting at.

“He saw in a vision, evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

Several thoughts are suggested by this narrative. The first, perhaps, will be this: Cornelius is confessedly a devout man, a benevolent man—what more does he want? Why should he not be left where he was? I apprehend, my friends, this would be a very reasonable question if the rest of the story is not true. It might be better for Cornelius to remain a devout heathen, than merely to be made a proselyte by some Jew who would have argued with him that his own religion was a mere lie, and that *his* religion was the true and safe one. But it is said here that God sent this messenger to Cornelius.

It seems to me that every prayer any man offers up is a petition for light; that every good thing he does is prompted by the Source of Good, and expresses a desire that the Source of Good will reveal Himself. St. Luke says that God answered this cry for light; that the alms came up for a memorial of what the man who

gave them desired and needed. That, I think, must be so if God is, and if He is such a God as the Bible describes Him to be. He will not leave man in ignorance of that which he most craves to know, because He has taught him something already. If the man cares for his fellow-creatures, He will enable him to know what concerns their well-being; what has been done and is doing for them as well as him.

And this may serve as an answer to some of the other doubts which this story will excite in certain minds. 'A vision,' 'an angel,' they will say, 'appearing evidently about the third hour; actually speaking of a man by name, telling where he lodges. Does not that look like superstition? Can such a record be worthy of the Infinite God?' My friends, state this objection fairly to yourselves—look it steadily in the face. You think, then, that the Infinite God does not trouble Himself about the little, about the personal, about your doings and mine, about your interests and mine? If you have adopted that conclusion, hold it as long as you can. I believe and hope that you will not be able to hold it very long. I am sure that you do feel that your doings, your well-being, are of importance; I am sure that when you grasp the thought of God, when you worship or pray to Him at all, you cannot suppose Him indifferent to them. I am sure you will not suppose that He cares for the universe, if you do not suppose that He cares for the sparrow. What St. Luke's story requires us to confess is, that the Living and Eternal God *did* care for this Roman soldier, did wish him to understand that which was for his good and for other men's good, did mean him to be an instrument of blessing to mankind. He has His

ways of communicating with men's hearts, of making them know what He would have them do. What do all illuminations that come to any man's mind of any kind mean, unless this is so? How are we ever led into one place or another, to enter into communication with one man or another, unless this is so?

All men who deliver to other men a message which God sends them are called in Scripture His angels. Those who have not the "muddy vesture of decay" which encloses us, and often chokes our voices, are His angels too in a simpler, higher sense. It is not superstition to think this. It is for us, as it was for Cornelius, a deliverance from superstition. Visible and material things become our gods; we suppose Him to be in the likeness of things in heaven, or in earth, or under the earth, if we do not think that the Invisible God holds intercourse with us for the very purpose of raising us above our slavery to these. I do not say that the thought of this angel might not have mixed with the thought of all the other angels or demigods of whom Cornelius had heard in his nursery, and so might not have been a new element of superstition in his mind, if the very message of this angel had not been to prepare him for the news of One in whom God and man, earth and heaven, are always bound together. I believe every new thought in our day about invisible communications will be an element of superstition, will lead us back into heathenism, if it does not lead us on to a more firm faith in Him of whom the man who lodged in the house of Simon the tanner was to tell the Roman centurion.

The next passage in the chapter takes us to this house in Joppa, whither Cornelius, in obedience to the

vision, had sent his servants. “On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.” There will be the same objections here as in the other case. Superstition will be the complaint against the vision to Peter, as against the vision to Cornelius. I should give the same answer in one case as in the other. St. Peter was delivered from a great superstition by this vision. I do not understand how he could have been delivered from it in any other way. He was a devout Jew, as Cornelius was a devout Gentile. He had been taught from his childhood that he ought to distinguish between clean and unclean animals, between that which was to be eaten and that which was not to be eaten. He found these distinctions in the book of his country’s laws. He believed that they had been established by God Himself. He could not surrender that faith without surrendering all his faith, without thinking that the whole life of himself and of his

nation was not under the government and cognizance of the Unseen and Righteous God, as he had supposed that it was. The man who had proselytized him to that opinion would have robbed him of a great truth, would have drawn him into a great falsehood. And yet he could not retain the notion that certain meats were good in themselves, and certain meats were evil, without denying in a very important sense the Lord of the whole earth, the Creator of all things. He could not retain that opinion about things without extending it to persons, without supposing that some of them were clean, some common in God's sight. How was he to be brought out of this confusion ? How was he to preserve all that had been given to him, and through that to arrive at a truth that was still hidden from him ? God must give the solution of the riddle. He must show His servant inwardly, mightily, by a demonstration to his heart, sustained, not superseded, by a token to his senses, that all things were clean in their relation to Him, that nothing was clean apart from Him. The distinction of clean and unclean meats had been a precious part of the education of the Jew. Like his circumcision, like all his other lessons, it had taught him that God was redeeming him, was redeeming all his works from the service of the flesh and of the outward world, that whatever was in bondage to these was in an evil condition. And now the vision declared to Peter that God had redeemed all things, that nothing was common or unclean, inasmuch as He had cleansed it. So the old dispensation passes into the new, and receives a fresh glory, both for its own sake and for the sake of that which it had introduced. Surely it was worth a revelation from heaven

to know this ! Surely nothing but a revelation could have imparted it ! The form of it was wonderfully adapted to that time and to the man who received it. The principle of it was for all times and all men.

And thus it interpreted itself at once to the apostle, outward facts, in this as in all cases, receiving an illumination from the discoveries made to the heart and reason, and giving a determinate sense to them. “ Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing : for I have sent them.” He goes with them, finds Cornelius waiting for him, receives an act of homage from him as if he were a divine person, assures him that he is a man like himself, and then utters the words which I have taken for my text—“ Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation ; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

The lesson has been accepted in its fulness. St. Peter owns not only what it said but what it implied. Nothing whatever—no man whatever—is common or unclean. The vision has told him why. That which God has cleansed cannot be common. God then had cleansed these heathens. There had been a redemption of men from the world, the flesh, and the devil,

to which they had been captive. Peter was ready to open his mouth and proclaim that redemption to Cornelius and his household, and those who were gathered about him. And this is his proclamation—“ Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

St. Peter starts from the statement that “God is no respecter of persons”: that “in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”; he ends with saying that “whosoever believeth” in Christ “shall receive remission of sins.” Are not these two statements incompatible? If the

last is true, can the first be true? Must not the belief come first, and the righteousness and the acceptance after? I think, brethren, we shall be wiser to adhere to the doctrine of the Scripture than to change it for notions of our own; wiser to adhere to the order which the apostles follow than to substitute for it an order of our own. So long as St. Peter thought of God as a respecter of persons, so long as he thought that God did not accept those who feared Him and wrought righteousness in every land, so long the acts of Christ were only in part intelligible to him. He had gone about doing good in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. He had healed those who were oppressed by the devil. He had shown Himself a deliverer in that region for two or three years. When they hanged Him on a tree, was that mercy over? was the Deliverer gone? No, God raised Him from the dead. They had seen Him, eaten and drunk with Him. They could testify to their countrymen,—‘This is your Lord.’ That must mean, ‘This is He that was always your Lord. This is He through whom God has always spoken to your fathers. This is the Angel of the Covenant who was with your fathers in the wilderness. This is that Son and Word of God of whom all the prophets are speaking, He in whom God could look upon your nation as a righteous and holy nation, in spite of your rebellions and idolatries.’

There he had stopped. Now he has learnt more. This Christ is Lord of all. In speaking peace to the Israelites, He was speaking peace to all. In revealing God to them, He was revealing Him to all. In proving that the devil was not the master of a few people in

the land, He was showing that he had no right over any people in any land. Therefore He must have been the Lord of all. He was the Lord of all before He came in the flesh ; therefore God must have looked upon mankind in Him, as well as upon the Jews in Him ; therefore there must have been always One near men who was speaking to them, and revealing God to them, whom they might fear and obey, in whose strength they might work righteousness.

If these things were so, they could not be made otherwise by the ignorance or the disbelief of men. The Deliverer and Lord of men must be, must reveal Himself, that they might know Him and believe Him. It was the privilege of His apostles to go forth and declare what He was and bear witness of Him. And then what a blessing would come from believing in such a Lord, such a Deliverer, such a Judge of quick and dead ! The sin which binds and pollutes the conscience would be sent away. There would be trust in God, peace with God ; trust which He Himself inspires, peace which He Himself makes. Whilst all notions and schemes of religion had but aggravated the sense of evil, had but given a greater sense of the distance from the Creator and Ruler of all, this good news from Him was the news of the conquest over evil, of His eternal union and fellowship in the Mediator with those who had broken His commands, and been at war with Him.

The effect of this message on those who heard it I purpose to consider next Sunday, connecting it with the defence which St. Peter was called to make of his conduct on his return to Jerusalem. I shall be satisfied if, to-day, I have led you to trace seriously these

two lines of thought—that by which the Gentile soldier was led to seek the lessons of the Jewish fisherman ; that by which the Jewish fisherman was fitted to be the witness of the Living and True God, the Reconciler and Deliverer of men, to the Roman soldier.

We need not be in haste to ascertain what was implied in the meeting of these two men ; what it signified respecting the overthrow of a barrier between the two divisions of the old world ; what it prophesied respecting the world that was to rise out of that world. The book which we have studied thus far will give us information on this subject also, when we are ripe for it. All its teaching is gradual ; all is distinct and personal. We become acquainted with the experiences of races through the experiences of men ; we learn what the kingdom of God is to do for the mass by seeing how it works against what distracted the heart of one here and there. And so we learn, far better than on a larger and grander scale, to feel the force of the principle I have been enforcing to-day.

God has shown us that nothing is common or unclean. The highest saint deserves that name, if we contemplate him apart from God. The poorest outcast in the street has no right to the name, when we think of her as one whose nature Christ took, for whom He poured out His blood. A glory descends from Him on men of every country and tribe. To those who own it and try to follow it, and ever amidst thick darkness are fearing God and working righteousness—to them and to all we may preach in Christ the full remission of sin.

XV.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

(16th February, 1862.)

“ Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ ; what was I, that I could withstand God ? ”—Acts xi. 17.

I PAUSED last Sunday at the end of St. Peter’s discourse to Cornelius. I wished that you might consider separately what the effect of this discourse was, and how this effect was produced.

The last verses of the 10th chapter and a good part of the following chapter have reference to this subject. In the 44th verse of the 10th chapter we read :—

“ While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we ? ”

There are several points in this narrative which

we must not overlook. Baptism, we are told on good evidence, was the ceremony by which proselytes from heathenism were admitted to the privileges of the outer court of the Temple. The son of Zacharias had preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins to the children of Abraham. Numbers of them had been awakened to the feeling that though they were the chosen people, the righteous nation, they were sinners in the sight of God; that they needed to have their sins sent away; that God only could send them away. John had spoken of another baptism, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire. On the day of Pentecost St. Peter had said to the multitude who cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" "Repent, and be baptized . . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

1. Supposing that St. Peter had gone to Cornelius with the temptation of an ordinary Hebrew, anxious to convince a Gentile of the folly of his own worship and the superiority of the Jewish worship, we may easily understand how he would have watched the countenance of his hearer, how pleased he would have been to notice that his arguments were shaking his previous belief, how strongly he would have urged him at once to put a barrier between himself and his previous associations by receiving the rite of baptism. Supposing St. Peter had gone as a disciple of John, he will have had a most high idea of the nature of baptism. He will have supposed it to

denote an inward, not an outward purification. Therefore he will have taken pains to discover whether these heathens actually felt that sin was a burden to them, and that they desired to be set free from it. For he will have remembered how John spoke to the Pharisees who came to his baptism, while they thought themselves righteous and despised others. How could he tell that Cornelius was not, like one of them, relying on his prayers and his almsdeeds? Even, therefore, if he could make up his mind to go in to a man of another nation, he might hesitate to give him the sign of remission. But supposing St. Peter was indeed a minister of Christ, would he not hesitate still more to bestow that baptism which was connected, as he had told the Jews, with such mighty promises, with such a transcendent gift? Must he not be very sure that these men had been led through all the previous stages of renouncing heathenism, of repenting of moral evils, before he could offer them this witness that they were verily and indeed members of the family of Christ?

We have seen in what spirit Peter went to Cæsarea. He had none of the ambition of a Jewish proselytizer. He did not desire to preach John's baptism of repentance. He needed a vision to show that he might attend to the summons of the Roman soldier. He went in the strong conviction that God was sending him, and that, therefore, he must cast away his own inclinations and prepossessions. His words, as well as his acts, correspond to this state of mind. He does not argue with Cornelius about his previous belief or his previous worship. He has no commis-

sion to do that. He has no knowledge which should fit him for the task. He declares only how the God of His fathers had sent forth Jesus, how He had gone about Judæa and Galilee doing good and delivering those that were oppressed of the devil. He declares this Jesus to be the Lord of all. Christ had died. Christ had risen. He had commanded His apostles to declare Him as the judge of quick and dead. All the prophets have been showing that they who believe in Him shall receive remission of their sins. He speaks what he knows. He awaits the issue. What is it? Are we told that Cornelius and his friends were much impressed, that they were overcome by St. Peter's reasoning, that they determined to become Christians? No, but that while they heard the word the Holy Spirit fell on them. They yielded to no arguments; they have heard none. They do not choose Him of whom the apostle spoke as their Master. He lays hold upon them, He makes them His servants.

2. They of the circumcision, we are told, were astonished when they saw that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. The highest privilege which could be conferred on men was conferred on these outcasts from the commonwealth of Israel. God claimed them as His. God endowed them with His own divine Presence. The astonishment was most natural. And yet what but this could have been sufficient to show Peter that he had not been merely wasting his words? What but this could have convinced them that Jesus was what He said He was, the Lord of all? St. Peter knew how it had been with him. He had not

followed Jesus till Jesus had called him. He had followed Him then ignorantly, confusedly; yielding to an attraction which was too weighty for him; often fighting with it, often showing how little he knew whence it had come. It was comparatively weak whilst he could see his Master; it came like a rushing wind when his Master had gone away. Then he had been able to remember what Jesus had said to him on earth; then he knew that His words were for his countrymen as well as himself; then he had been able to set forth His acts as the acts of an anointed King. For the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, had conquered his will and reason, had made him captive, and had made him free. It had been the same with every one of his companions. Which of them could boast that he had arrived by any long train of reasoning at the belief that the Man of Nazareth who was crucified under Pontius Pilate was the only begotten Son of God? Which of them could say that he had received that belief because he attached greater weight to the opinion of a few Galilæans than to the opinion of the Sanhedrim and of all the wise men in Judæa? Both statements were equally at variance with their experience—I am bold to say it,—equally absurd. Their strongest prejudices had been dislodged by no subtle arguments or human authority. Over them—their own selves, their inmost being—a power had been exerted, gentle it might be, like the softest summer shower; fierce it might be, like the heat of the noonday sun; but in either case penetrating and victorious, one which evoked what seemed to be feeblest in them, triumphed over that which seemed to be invincible. And

over nothing it had prevailed like their sects, divisions, and hatreds; nothing had it evoked like that sense of fellowship and unity which lay crushed and slumbering within them. Now that same sense was awakened in these Gentiles, there were tokens that they were no longer excluded from the divine commonwealth. Who had done it? St. Peter? No, verily. If there were no Holy and Uniting Spirit of God seeking to bring households and nations together, the winds would have heeded His voice as much as the household of the Roman centurion.

3. It is said, "They spake with tongues." It was not to be left to St. Peter, or to them of the circumcision who were with him, to guess that this operation had been produced by God's Spirit and not by man's oratory. The same evidence was given which had been given at the day of Pentecost. It had the same force now as then. The different languages were the barrier between races; the union of language was the pledge of their reconciliation. If a proof was to be given that the Roman and the Jew were one in Christ, what diviner proof could be given than this?

4. And now observe how St. Peter's words about the baptism of Cornelius harmonize all that precedes them. "Can any man," he says, "forbid water?" 'The whole matter has been taken out of our hands. We have no discretion. We did not come to make you converts. We came because you asked for us. We came because God would have us come. He has showed what His will is. We are merely His instruments to satisfy it. We must own you as members of our fellowship, for He has made you

members of it. He has broken down the barrier between us. We but give you the pledge that it is broken down.'

St. Peter's own justification of himself is precisely that which I have drawn from St. Luke's story. "When Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." He rehearses the whole matter to them, relates his vision, describes his meeting with Cornelius. He attaches less importance to his words even than the historian attaches to them. "And as I began to speak," he says, "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then," he adds, "remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." That was the preparation for the Gospel, this was the Gospel itself. Those who received this blessing received the highest witness and token which God Himself could bestow upon them, the pledge of His own presence with them, the pledge that He had adopted them to be His children. "Forasmuch then," he says, "as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" 'A mighty will was working for the renovation of these human creatures, for their reconciliation with us. What was I, a poor mortal, to fight with that will? What could I do but yield myself an instrument to accomplish it?'

I have tried to bring out as literally and as fully as I can those particulars in this narrative which appear to be most characteristic of the apostolic age—which

we suppose can have least that resembles it in this present age. Would not you count any missionary a great fanatic who expected that, when he spoke to heathens, the Spirit of God should come down to confirm his words? Would not you say that he is left to the power of ordinary arguments to convince men that their idolatries are false, and that they ought to confess the True God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

My friends, let us understand this question clearly. Is it meant that a missionary would deserve the name of a fanatic who expected to find those who heard him speaking with new tongues, as Jews did at the day of Pentecost, or as Cornelius and his heathen friends did? If that is meant, I should say, Such a preacher might perhaps deserve to be called a fanatic; but I think he would still more deserve to be called an unbeliever in the message of the New Testament; for if that message is true, those unusual signs which at first confirmed it have done their work. They have established what they were designed to establish. We do not ask for them again, because we have learned the lesson they were to teach us. But if it is meant that the missionary is to depend upon his own great powers of reasoning, or upon the authority of quotations of Western teachers, to overcome the deeply-rooted prejudices of a Hindoo or a Mahometan, to persuade him that He whom we own as our Lord is indeed the Lord of all; that, I should say, was more fanatical still—the very frenzy of self-confidence. And what escape is there from it? None, I think, but in a recurrence to the faith of St. Peter, that when we proclaim any good tidings to our fellow-

creatures—any truth which can deliver them from falsehoods that degrade them, and can satisfy the yearning of their hearts—we are simply going forth on God's errands, to be witnesses of what He is, to be witnesses of what His will is to His creatures, and how He can bring their wills into accordance with His, their reasons to apprehend His reason. And when they do receive this testimony—when they cast aside not the faith of their infancy, but the unbelief of their infancy and their manhood also,—when they confess a God of all goodness and truth to be their God,—when they perceive that Christ has shown forth in manhood that God of all goodness and truth, and has united men to God in Himself,—when they desire to be made in His image and to do His work—then I am sure that it is not fine arguments, but the Holy Spirit of God who has brought them up to this mind; that they have not adopted a new God, but that the God who is and always has been their God has adopted them, and has opened their understanding to know Him. I think the Bible, taken according to its plain letter, teaches us this doctrine, and I cannot say that we gain by refining away this plain letter. May we not have involved ministers in many needless embarrassments by losing sight of it? Would not the preacher to heathens, would not the preacher to Christians, speak more clearly, more hopefully, if he did not imagine that it depended upon his wisdom or his power of speech to enforce any part of the testimony which he bore, that whatever is true in it is true in another sense than his thoughts, and that Another than he will make it effectual for the minds and hearts of those who need it? Would it not be better for our

simplicity to trust our understanding, our affections, all that is within us, to One who knows the thoughts, and can purify them and can direct them aright, than to be debating how much the understanding can do, and how much the affections can do, and what neither can do ? Might we not give up our faith to the Author of our faith, to nourish it and direct it to the proper objects ? Might we not give up our work to Him who worketh in us that we may will and do of God's good pleasure ?

These are the instances, I think, of the good which it might do us to remember, as St. Peter did, the promise of the New Testament, that Christ would baptize not with water only, but with the Holy Spirit. That recollection did not make St. Peter less careful to baptize Cornelius with water. He rejoiced in the outward sign because he believed in its signification. Surely, if we attached the full force to that signification, we should not prize our baptism and our children's baptism less, but more than we have done. We should take it as a witness and pledge that our growth and theirs does not depend ultimately upon us or them ; that God's Holy Spirit plants in us the first seeds of intelligence, of affection, of belief ; that He causes them to ripen ; that He is nigh at hand to destroy what is hindering them from springing up and bearing fruit. Oh, if we had believed that, how much sin and sorrow would it have saved us ! And why should we not believe it now ? Why should not we ask the Holy Spirit to give us remission of the sin, and to make the sorrow into a blessing ?

Again, we are often haunted by the question, whether there is some mighty difference between the

way in which we receive truths into our minds concerning God and Christ and truths of any other kind ; truths, say, with which the physical student is occupied. I think, my friends, that if we were believers in a Spirit of truth proceeding from the Father and the Son, we need not be tormented by this difficulty. Whatever in our minds is receptive of falsehood, this the Spirit will be continually warning us of, this He will be seeking to destroy. Whatever is receptive of truth, this He will be unfolding. And every truth comes at last to a man prepared for it with a demonstration. It breaks in upon him. He bows before it. We may, blessed be God, be instruments of imparting truth to each other, because we are members of one body, and are formed to work with each other, for each other. But we are such instruments only because the spirit in one man speaks to the spirit in his fellow, and this it does most when the Spirit of God is guiding actually both.

The compilers of our lessons chose the latter part of the first chapter of the book for our second Whitsunday lesson. Thereby they intimated we were to fix our thoughts upon the words of which I have spoken to-day, as a fulfilment of the meaning of Whitsuntide. It was beginning to be fulfilled when the whole body of Jews scattered through the earth were affirmed to be members of one body, because all might drink into one Spirit. It was a fresh step in its fulfilment when the Spirit brought Samaritans into that same fellowship. It was a more signal fulfilment when this Roman soldier and his comrades knew that they and Jews had one Head and one heart. Was there to be no grander fulfilment still ? Could Christendom have

existed if there had not been ? Can it continue to exist if it does not bear a witness to all mankind that Christ has died, and lives as their Head ? Can it continue to exist if it does not perceive that His will is that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and if it does not say as St. Peter said, “ What am I, that I should withstand God ? ”

XVI.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

(23rd February, 1862.)

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”
—Acts xi. 26.

THROUGHOUT this book St. Luke carefully distinguishes the Hellenists, who were Jews by birth and profession, though they had mingled with Hellenes, or Grecians, and perhaps had been brought up among them, and the Hellenes themselves. There were Hellenists in the Church from the first. The complaint that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration, while the natives of Palestine were favoured, led to the appointment of the seven deacons. As I observed to you, Stephen himself and the majority of those deacons were apparently Hellenists. That circumstance marked them out as links between the Jews and the surrounding nations. Stephen, when he had once believed in Christ, seems to have spoken with singular boldness about the destruction of the exclusive privileges of the Jews. But the Hellenists generally were specially tenacious of these privileges. Synagogues composed of them

denounced Stephen to the High Priest. When Saul came to Jerusalem after his conversion, he argued with them because he knew them so well, and they plotted to kill him.

Unfortunately our translators have used the word "Grecians" to represent both the Hellenists and the Hellenes; those who were strictly Jews, not merely proselytes, but originally, and those who grew up in the worship of different gods. We do not, therefore, feel the importance of the announcement of the 19th and 20th verses of this chapter. They seem to be only saying what was said before, instead of marking, as they do, a great stage in the history.

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus."

These exiles, of course, told their kinsmen and their countrymen that they believed Jesus to be the King of whom the prophets had spoken. They had confessed His name, they would beseech all true sons of Abraham to confess it too. But whatever hints their martyr might have given that this King must have a larger dominion, subjects that were not circumcised, they did not venture to make any general proclamation of Him. They may have been even more careful than formerly to assert their Jewish position, lest they should justify the scandal against the believers in Jesus, that they made light of that position. There is no need, however, to assume

any additional vigilance. Their old habits would lead them to avoid converse with Gentiles on sacred topics, however they might be obliged to traffic with them in the things of earth.

But this unnatural silence could not always be preserved. At Antioch it was broken through. We do not hear the name of the man who had first the courage to transgress it. He may have done it with no deliberation. He may have been startled when he found what he had done. At some moment or other the thought will have come powerfully to him, "What then? Is the Lord whom I declare to be the Son of God, *not* the Lord of these idolaters? Do I say that? But, if He is, may I not tell them so?" A simple course of reasoning, it appears to us. My friends, what we call simple courses of reasoning are the hardest of all to follow, the hardest of all to act upon. No one ever does act or can act upon a conclusion which he has evolved by a process of argument. A force from within must propel him, events without must determine the moment when he shall do what ancient habits and traditions forbid him to do. That which God means to be spoken must be spoken at last. But He will determine the when and the how. So it will be proved to be His word, through whatever lips it may reach mortal ears.

"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." It was not a mistake therefore. These men of Cyprus and Cyrene had not ventured upon a rash or unlawful step. They had no outward authority to take it, no apostle in Jerusalem had given them leave.

They had only said what they were convinced was true. And the men to whom they said it confessed that it was true; true for them. It was not the first time they had heard of this Lord. He had spoken to them often in the watches of the night, by the beds of dying friends they had heard His voice. He must be that very Person of whom these men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke, He who had gone about doing good, He who had died and risen again. To that Lord whom they could not see, in whom they could trust, they turned from the gods whom they could see and could not trust.

“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.” The tidings, we may gather from these words, were startling. The Church at Jerusalem was not prepared for them. No doubt they had some recent lessons which must have led their thoughts in this direction. A Roman centurion and his household had listened to the words of an apostle. The Holy Spirit had descended upon men who were uncircumcised. But one example of a principle does not always make us more ready to acknowledge the next. It may make us tremble. Our feet are on the edge of a river deep and rapid; our feet are wet already: must we plunge in? So the disciples at Jerusalem may well have thought: ‘Yes! to baptize a single centurion, perhaps a few devout friends besides; we did not approve of that movement, only it seemed to be an inevitable exception from our rule. But a number of Greek idolaters claiming fellowship with the chosen race;

what can that mean? where can it end?' A question surely most difficult to answer; impossible, one would say, for any man or any church to answer. Where God's purposes would end! what would be the limit of His designs for those whom His Son had not been ashamed to call His brethren! The Church of Jerusalem was still faithful enough to be convinced that it could not withstand God, that what He ordained must come to pass. They might preserve their own Jewish purity, but they would at least send Barnabas as far as Antioch to see whether the same maxims must be adhered to there.

"Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

Barnabas, himself of Cyprus, but one of the earliest of the Jerusalem converts—one who had given the strongest proofs of his allegiance to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship—was selected, probably, as a fitting person to watch, and if need were, to correct the zeal and extravagance of these Cyprian Jews who had preached to the Greeks, and had consorted with them as brothers. Whatever purpose he went with, the facts which he saw were too strong for him. He could not deny that these Greeks had the same faith as the children of Abraham; he could not find any excuse for saying that they were not entitled to be members of the same body. And soon he wanted no excuse. This meeting together of Jews and Gentiles filled him with a delight which no ancient opinions, no deeply rooted habits, could check. It spoke of something mightier than all opinions, deeper than all habits, deeper than

the divine law itself. The grace of God, not the self-will of man, had set at nought the restrictions of the law. The One Lord had called men of different races to obey Him. Barnabas could only beseech them all—whatever their race, origin, previous education might be—to cleave to that Lord, to believe that He was their Lord, and to act as if He were.

The historian stops for a moment to account for this state of mind in one who had then, and showed that he had afterwards, all the sympathies, even the fears and suspicions, of an Israelite.

“ For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.”

No better or fuller explanation than this could be given of the satisfaction which Barnabas felt in a change that must at first have surprised and bewildered him. He was a good man. A thousand objections of prejudice and of policy fall before that one word. He arrived at a safer conclusion through his goodness and his pleasure in what was good than he could have reached by any reasonings. This union of strange races commended itself to his heart, however little he might be able to understand it. And this because his goodness was not his own. He was full of faith in a good God. He saw His will in this blending of strange elements. He bowed before a Love that was higher and deeper than he could measure. The Holy Ghost raised him above himself, made him perceive in that which naturally he shrank from, the fulfilment of all divine signs and promises.

“ And much people,” it is said, “ was added to the Lord”: Jews, perhaps, who had shrunk from the contact of the uncircumcised, as well as Greeks, felt the

impression of his good words and his good deeds, and yielded to the Spirit who spoke through both.

But to cement such a union, to make it solid and permanent, something was needed besides this sympathy, excellent and divine as that was. Saul had been trained in a severer school to understand the equality of the Jew and Greek. Not through kindly affections and gracious impulses—rather through the most tremendous overthrow of his unkindness and bitterness, through the crushing of a lofty pride, through the discovery that he had rebelled more against God than any one of those whom he supposed to be accursed of God—had he passed from darkness to light. In himself had he been forced to read the truth which was to be applied in his dealings—in God's dealings—with mankind. Barnabas, who had been his friend when no other in the Jerusalem Church would own him, probably knew this. Saul may have spoken to him of the indignation which had been excited in him when he suspected that Stephen was striking at the difference between Jew and Gentile, and of the steps by which his own mind had been opened to feel that the difference could be maintained no longer. Barnabas may have been staggered by the announcement, may have besought Saul to consider it more thoroughly, and in silence, before he frightened his countrymen with it. Now that he had himself been brought, in the only way in which a man of his character was likely to be brought—by the evidence of facts—to a similar conclusion, it was natural that he should do what we are told in the 25th verse that he did.

“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek

Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch." Clearly that was the place for him. There, and not in Jerusalem, he could turn the lessons of his conversion to account. There he might use his Greek as well as his rabbinical lore. Thence he might go forth—not to ground which had been prepared for him, as this was, but to bring other soils into cultivation—to show that the principle which had been first illustrated in Syria was one which would make itself felt in every country and every age.

"And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The Church at Antioch is then the earliest specimen of a Church into which the Gentile element enters, in which it is combined with the Jewish. The lively and frivolous people of that city, celebrated for skill in devising names, observed the strange union of what had seemed to them irreconcilable opposites, and called the brotherhood from the name which was oftenest on their lips. That I take to be the explanation of the assertion that they were first called Christians then; for it is not a name which the apostles themselves use often. It never occurs in St. Paul's writings; only once in St. Peter's. They bore witness that Jesus was *the* Christ. They always assumed that their countrymen were acknowledging *a* Christ and expecting a manifestation of Him. The title therefore must have been bestowed upon them, not sought by them. If it could have kept its original force, if it could have only signified that they confessed One who was the anointed Son

of God and Son of Man, and that they confessed themselves to be anointed by His Spirit, it would have been appropriate at Antioch, at Jerusalem, everywhere. But the image and superscription were sure to be rubbed off the coin. It would soon come to denote a sect which was neither Jewish nor Gentile, not a body called out of both Jews and Gentiles to witness for their union in the Head of all men.

St. Luke is most desirous that we should not feel a new Church to have begun at Antioch, because a new and most important step was taken in the development of the Church which existed already. He interrupts his narrative to tell us of the coming of Agabus to Antioch with the news of a coming famine. The mission of Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem to carry relief to the brethren in Judæa is no casual or insignificant fact. It indicates that the sense of brotherhood which had been first exhibited within one city now extends to the different cities, and that it expresses itself in the same way. More of the idea—may I not rather say more of the reality? of a Catholic Church, a Church united by one Spirit, not limited by place, comes out in such a narrative than in a multitude of disquisitions.

For the same purpose, I suppose, and to make us feel that the Jewish community is not forgotten while we are occupied with the daughters that are to come forth from it, St. Luke further interrupts the story of the doings of the Church at Antioch to tell us in the 12th chapter how "Herod slew James the brother of John with the sword"; how, seeing that his conduct "pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take

Peter also"; how he intended to bring him forth to the people after the Passover; how the angel of the Lord opened the prison door and delivered him. The story is made more striking and personal by its being combined with the appearance of Peter at the house of Mark, where a number of men and women were offering prayers for him. It is followed by the narrative of Herod's death, after his oration to the people of Tyre and Sidon.

Incidents of this kind have often an interest for readers who can scarcely bring themselves to think of the main object of the book in which they occur. The Divine Wisdom provides for the sustenance of such readers as of all others. But it provides also warnings against an unhealthy use to which records like that of St. Peter's release, and still more of Herod's death, may be turned. We may talk of the deliverance of St. Peter as a divine interposition. But we are reminded just before that another warrior as brave, as dear to Christ, fell, and that no arm was stretched out to save him. And we know that St. Paul lay for years in his prison at Rome, and that if he had been set free from it some of the most precious portions of the New Testament could not have been written. Is, therefore, this way of talking about divine interposition exactly the right one? Is not the whole book a history of the divine Government over men? Does it not teach us to refer every event whatsoever, in one time or another, to the divine Providence? If St. James died with the sword; if St. Peter was brought out of prison; if St. Paul lay in prison and wrote his epistles there, is not God's hand as much in one of these events as another? Are we not yielding to a very dangerous unbelief—the

very unbelief from which the Scriptures are most seeking to guard us—when we fancy that the preaching of the men of Cyprus to the Greeks at Antioch, and their belief in the words, are less wonderful or divine than the removal of the chains which bound St. Peter? Is any man raised now out of any moral ignorance—out of any bodily sickness—except by the same Almighty Power, working as in that case, through an intermediate messenger?

The story of Herod's death is quoted often as an interposition in another sense. Herod had killed James and had imprisoned Peter; therefore, we are told, he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. When we do this, we should recollect that we are not merely imputing words to the historian which he does not use, but that we are contradicting those which he does use. He attributes Herod's death, doubtless, to God, as he would attribute any other death. He speaks of it as a divine punishment. He does not speak of it as a punishment for those crimes. He attributes it to his vanity and self-glorification. 'If,' you say, 'he must have meant us to understand the other reason, why does he introduce the story in that place?' I answer, 'I cannot tell why he introduces it; perhaps, for the very purpose of warning us not to be hasty in assuming that two events which happen near each other are necessarily connected with each other as cause and effect; perhaps, to show that we may reason entirely amiss if we do.' At all events, I can have no business to read my speculations into the book, and to say the writer must have intended this, though he says something quite unlike it; and seeing that this is literally the only passage, in the whole New Testament, which

furnishes even the shadow of a precedent for the innumerable attempts that have been made in later ages to pronounce upon the causes of the deaths of those who have died suddenly and fearfully, I must say that it can never warrant us to forget those words which were spoken with authority by Him whose words will not pass away: Think you that “those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Here is the true use to be made of such a story as that of Herod. Let each of us, priests and laymen, take care that we do not glory in the might of our own words. Let us believe assuredly that whatever is right or true or effectual in them comes of God. Let us believe that there is a worm in all self-exaltation, which preys upon the souls, if not upon the bodies, of those who indulge it. If a desire of applause from the multitude led Herod to acts of injustice and cruelty, it may have come back to himself in the shape of punishment; it will surely come back to us in some punishment less obvious and glaring, perhaps not less corroding and consuming. Therefore, let us fear to “judge, lest we should be judged.” For when we judge another, we refuse to give God the glory, we assume His prerogative. We show that we are dissembling with our consciences in the matter. Let us not use that insincere and pernicious phrase:—‘Of course, we do not presume to judge, only such an enemy of the Gospel did perish in a very singular manner.’ That is an attempt to cheat the devil, and a very miserable attempt. We do pass the judgment, we do take a

pleasure in passing it, only we have not courage directly to contradict Christ's words. And that is because we do not really believe that He is the Judge, that He sees into the thoughts and intents of our hearts, that He will bring all things to light.

And now the historian quits Herod, St. Peter, and Jerusalem to return with Barnabas and Saul to Antioch, where a work is prepared for them—one of the greatest that men had ever to do on this earth, one which was performed centuries ago, which concerns us, if we knew it, more nearly than most of the events which are passing before our eyes.

XVII.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

(2nd March, 1862.)

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.”—Acts xii. 25.

I ENDEAVOURED to show you last Sunday what position Antioch holds in the history of the Church. The name of Christians, which the disciples received there, is a hint—though only a hint—of that position. It shows that the Church there was not merely Jewish, that a new and strange mixture had taken place between Jews and Greeks. It will mislead us if it tempts us to suppose that the Church there, in any sense, disconnected itself from the purely Jewish society which had confessed Jesus to be the Christ in Jerusalem.

The two names, Barnabas and Saul, represent to us the union between these two bodies and the distinction between them. Barnabas belongs to the Jerusalem society, has belonged to it since its commencement. Saul had been the most active persecutor of that society, because he saw that their confession of Jesus must lead them at last to regard Jews and Gentiles

as alike partakers in the divine mercy. Once convinced that he himself was a sinner like the Gentiles, he could not stop short of the conviction that his King and Saviour was also theirs. He could not therefore stop at the point at which the Jerusalem disciples were still willing to stop. He must regard the exceptions which they were willing to make from their Jewish rules as the assertion of a principle which was higher and deeper than that rule. Nevertheless, he dared take no step in conformity with these convictions. His way must be marked out for him. It was marked out at Antioch. Greeks there had believed; Jews had been obliged to acknowledge brotherhood with them. He was submitting to the Divine Will, not setting up his own self-will, in accepting the state of things which he found. He could show, as no one else could, how reasonable, how in harmony with all the purposes of God, that state of things was.

Barnabas and Saul had given the best token they could give of their unity of heart and spirit with the Church in Jerusalem. They had brought the offerings of the brethren in the richer city to relieve the needs of those in the poorer. They now returned to their own proper sphere, taking with them a man who seems to have been of repute in the Jerusalem Church, and who probably shared strongly in its fears and prejudices. He may have been destined to be hereafter an evangelist. Many traditions are in favour of that opinion. What we know of him is that he was sister's son to Barnabas, and that he was the occasion of a dispute between the two teachers, of which we shall hear in a later part of this book.

The opening of the thirteenth chapter presents them to us as prophets or teachers in the Church at Antioch. They are mingled with several others who have the same title; no special eminence is assigned them; Barnabas is put first on the list, Saul last. The prophet is now, as always in the Jewish Scriptures, he who speaks forth the mind and purpose of God, whether concerning the past, the present, or the future. The teacher may have been peculiarly the interpreter of the written letter; he whose business it was to see that it did not sink into a mere letter; to show that it was a message of life, and that it contained lessons for life. So that, whatever the distinction was between the offices, there will probably have been no formal separation between them; the prophet and the teacher will have been felt to be both speaking to men for and from God.

But the time came when two of these prophets or teachers understood that they were not to remain at Antioch. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted," so we are told in the second verse, "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Our first impulse in this, as in most cases, is to regard such language as quite peculiar, quite unlike any that would be appropriate to this age. That it was apostolic language I admit at once, mainly for this reason: There is no intimation whatever that any visible appearance to Barnabas and Saul, or to the members of the Church of Antioch generally, helped them to interpret the Divine Will. The Holy Ghost, the Invisible Teacher, is signified to be the author of the command which was confessed and obeyed. Now

here, I think, undoubtedly is an evidence of the new dispensation ; of that divine government which is exercised over the movements of the human reason and will. Outward signs and tokens have a great worth. They attest the reality and the universality of God's gifts, as in the case of the water in baptism and the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. They prevent men from fancying that their thoughts, and impressions, and beliefs, create the blessings which are bestowed upon us by God's free grace. They connect the Old Testament with the New, the revelation of God as a ruler over men with the revelation of His rule in men. But when we talk of that which is properly, distinctly apostolic, we speak of the Holy Spirit, of whose presence and gifts the apostles are the first distinctly to bear witness. The sight of a flaming fire in the bush prepared Moses, the greatest of the old teachers and prophets, for his work as a leader of the people out of Egypt. A fleece wet with dew, when all around was dry, convinced Gideon that he was their elected deliverer from the tyranny of the Midianites. No bush, no fleece, is necessary to show Barnabas and Saul, as they are ministering to the Lord and fasting, that they are to begin a work of deliverance greater than that of Moses or of Gideon. They become convinced, as clearly as they can be of the presence of any object presented to their bodily senses, that they are inwardly called to go forth on an errand for which years of discipline have been preparing them.

When, therefore, we say that the example given here does not apply to our times, what exactly do we mean? Do we mean that we are under the same conditions as

the men were under the old covenant ? Do we suppose that a man must see a fire in a bush, or a fleece wet with dew, before he devotes himself to any great task for the good of his country or of mankind ? Or do we suppose that men devote themselves to such tasks without any strong sense that they are urged and bound to undertake them ? What are all authentic and worthy autobiographies but testimonies that there has been a force upon the minds of great students, patriots, reformers—upon all who have been able to achieve anything for their fellow-creatures—a force determining them in spite of many obstacles without and inclinations within ; in spite of diffidence, reluctance, cowardice ; in spite of resolute efforts to do something entirely different from the course which proved itself ultimately to be the right one, the one for which all their energies and education fitted them ? Explain these facts as you please, they *are* facts. They seem to me facts of precisely the same kind with that of which St. Luke speaks. The same Spirit who made it clear to Barnabas and Saul—clear to all their friends and companions—that they were to go forth as messengers of the kingdom of God, has been stirring up those who have engaged in these later enterprises ; has been making it manifest to them that they were set apart by a Divine Ruler to a work which they must always consider, not as their own, but as His. Barnabas and Saul had, no doubt, often felt before that they had this vocation. But they dared not trust to any impression, however often repeated. They must suspect themselves. They must adopt the discipline they found most effectual for putting them beyond the reach of mere sensible influences. They must submit their thoughts to the

judgment of their brethren in the Church. Then by degrees it would become plain to them that they had not been deceived ; that they might confide in the highest wisdom to fit them for walking in the way which it had prepared for them.

That he verily believes he is called by the Holy Ghost to undertake the ministry of Christ's Gospel is a profession which every English clergyman must make at his ordination. He may often stammer when he makes it ; he may fear that he is saying more than he has a right to say ; but surely he will stammer more when he comes to deliver his message, if he did not begin with that conviction, and if it does not grow stronger in him. For he must feel every day that such words as he has to utter are either the vainest, the most profane, of all words, or that they are words which God Himself wishes men to hear, and which He can open their ears to hear. Does he really dream that any tricks of oratory will commend them to any man's conscience, will write them in any man's heart ? The sense of personal weakness, coldness, heartlessness, absolute incapacity to make any understand or feel that which it is most needful they should understand and feel must, I should think, be deepened in the teacher by every year's and week's experience. What can become of him, if he may not fall back upon the certainty that nothing which is true, nothing which is good, is his, or can depend for its triumph upon him ? And if this be true in the highest sense of the Christian priest, it must be true also of every man in every profession and business whatsoever. If he thoroughly believes that he is called to his duties, not by some accident, not by some mere chance of his own, but by a Spirit who would

make him His minister for the good of men, he will devote himself to those duties with another energy and another hope ; he will be sure that he shall be quickened when he is most desponding ; that he shall be enabled to be just and honest when the temptations to insincerity and unfaithfulness are the most appalling.

That this belief of an inward call does not make an outward designation to any office whatever less reasonable or less desirable, the case of Barnabas and Saul is an instance and a proof.

“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Such an act could have no effect upon the synagogues or upon the heathen assemblies into which they might go when they had left Antioch. But it would always be a witness to Barnabas and Saul themselves that they were members of a body ; that the body had approved and publicly confessed their call ; that they were to claim all who heard them, at ever so great a distance from Antioch or Jerusalem, as belonging to the same body. How much this conviction affected the mind of St. Paul no reader of his epistles can be ignorant.

“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia ; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

That they go forth in obedience to a divine inspiration we are again reminded. But the place to which they travel was determined, to all appearance, by what we call ordinary human considerations ; they go to the very country in which Barnabas was born, which he was likely to know best, and in which he

may have left friends. Do we feel any contradiction in these two statements? Have we accustomed ourselves to associate, as many do, the movements and impulses of the Spirit of God with that which is contrary to sense and reason? Oh! reject that notion at once, or if you cannot do that, let the study of the New Testament uproot it. The Spirit from above, the Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind; He must act on the human spirit to deliver it from its caprices and fantasies, to show it what is the simplest, most healthful, most natural course of conduct. Saul and Barnabas may have devised many schemes for reclaiming the most distant provinces of the earth. He will have taught them to seek that first with which they have some tie of kindred and of home.

“And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.”

Everything in this history and in the history of the Church at Antioch has marked them out as messengers to the Gentiles. What work were they separated for if not for this? Nevertheless, they go into the synagogues. Their countrymen have their homes and their work in the capital of Cyprus. To them they bring the news that the Deliverer is come. If they believe it, they may discover why they were set in the midst of the island from which the goddess of beauty derived her favourite title; what they may do for its inhabitants. It would seem as if John Mark were watching them carefully lest they should take any dangerous step, as if he were ready to leave them if ever Saul tempted his kinsman to forsake the synagogue for the Greek assembly. But Saul

can wait to do his own appointed work. He is too sure of his calling and of the guidance under which he is walking to make haste. He will speak to Jews so long as Jews will listen to him.

And soon he has evidence that Jews might be exercising the most pernicious influence over heathens; might be making the wisdom of the law and the prophets serve for the strengthening of all that was most hateful and debasing in the superstition of the Roman Empire.

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” The picture is a very clear one, just as if it were drawn yesterday, and yet bringing before us some of the peculiar characteristics of the first century. An honourable, sensible, straightforward Roman governor, who has been taught from his youth up to esteem divination sacred, and suspects that his own augurs are using it only for purposes of deception, falls in the way of a wily Jew. This Bar-jesus—so Jews call him—or Elymas, the wise man, according to his Arabian title, has many things to tell Sergius Paulus which he has not heard before, and which make him worth hearing. Elymas affirms that he can practise divination more successfully than the augurs, for he knows that secret Word of God, the mysterious cabalistic name, which they do not know. Two other

Jews come to the island. They boast no arts of divination. But they speak of a divine Word of God who teaches and enlightens men. The deputy, or proconsul, would like to know what they mean. There is something in the message which commends itself to his conscience. The trader in spells is alarmed. He puts forth all his cabala and all his conjuring to confound them. It is a question whether lying or truth is the stronger; whether the Word which gives light or the word which wraps itself in darkness shall prevail.

“Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.” And is this the Saul or Paul, some will exclaim, who, in the epistle we have just read, speaks of charity as above all graces—higher than faith or hope? Can he call a fellow-creature by such names as these? Can he pronounce such a sentence upon him and believe that the God of charity will ratify it? Yes, my friends. It is that same Paul. For charity with him does not mean what it means with some of us—tolerance of lies, tolerance of that which is making mankind miserable. Elymas, and such as Elymas, were doing a mischief in the world which no brigands and murderers were doing. They were corrupting all classes of society from the highest to

the lowest. They were confounding all distinctions of right and wrong. They were making gold and reputation by deceptions. They were leading honest men to think that what is called an invisible and spiritual power is only another name for craft and jugglery. Was it mercy or charity to leave men in this belief? Was it mercy or charity to the deceiver himself? Security had been his curse. Success was his damnation. Such an event as this at the commencement of the ministry of the apostle to the Gentile world was the most signal witness that could have been borne that the Gospel of Christ must wage war—a deadly, exterminating war—in all places and in all times with the spirit of falsehood, whatever shapes it may take, whatever disguises it may put on. In this instance the minister of the spirit was one of the chosen people; his power must have consisted in that which he had learnt in the schools of the prophets, or the divine book. In after days the enchanter and the miraclemonger would borrow his lesson from the New Testament, would practise impostures in the name of Him who said, “I am the Truth.” The curse of the apostle will sound through the ages against the last as against the first. Punishments terrible and manifold—a darkness that might be felt—would descend upon Christians as upon Jews, upon churches as upon individuals, that perverted the right ways of the Lord, that corrupted the divine Word to their own purpose. It would be seen that there is a God of righteousness, a God who judges, a God who will deliver the heathen that desire to know Him from any that have the means of knowing Him and in their works deny Him. For it is written:—

“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” He saw that the Truth was mighty; he felt that it was mighty. It blinded the eyes of Elymas for a season. It opened an eye in him which was not to be closed. And so there was foreshown in an example the change which was coming upon the world. Darkness was descending upon the race which had been appointed to diffuse the light of God over the earth. The light was compelling races which had been groping blindly for it to confess it and bend before it. Yet the blessing was to come through the sons of Abraham. Sergius Paulus, the representative of Roman grandeur and dominion, was to learn who is the Word of God, the King of kings, from a Jewish tentmaker. Saul of Tarsus was to become the Paul whose name would be remembered and blessed eighteen centuries after in the remotest province of the West which the Cæsar ruled, in worlds of which he never dreamed. And this because he bore witness that a bread had come down from heaven of which we might eat and not die; that a new wine has been poured out which Jews and heathen may drink together in the Father’s kingdom. Let us ask to be fed this day with that bread, to be sustained with that wine. Then the true Spirit of Christ will take possession of us, the Spirit which will bear all things, endure all things, except falsehood; which will send forth a fire to consume that utterly.

XVIII.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

(23rd March, 1862.)

“ Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets ; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”—
Acts xiii. 40, 41.

WE are told that Mark, the companion of Paul and Barnabas, left them from Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem. The sturdy Jew may have feared that the conversion of a Roman so illustrious as Sergius Paulus would lead them to overlook altogether the difference between their race and the uncircumcised, that henceforth they would no longer care to visit the synagogues. If he thought so he was mistaken. At Antioch in Pisidia we find them adhering to their rule. They join at once in the worship of their brethren. They do not open their lips till the ruler of the synagogue invites them, if they have “any word of exhortation for the people,” to say on. The speech which St. Paul delivers then is markedly Jewish throughout.

“ Men of Israel,” he begins, “ and ye that fear God, give audience.” “ Men of Israel.” ‘ You may be Pharisees,

you may be Sadducees, you may be rich men or poor men, you may be devout men or indifferent men. I address you in none of these characters ; I speak to you as belonging to a common race, I appeal to you as children of a great ancestor. And ' "ye that fear God"—' you that have abjured the worship of other gods, of gods whom you can see and handle, you that have joined yourselves to the Lord God of Abraham, the God in whom you must believe and trust, whom you cannot see'—"give audience."

That to which they are to give audience is the history of their calling. "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it." The Jews in Pisidia were familiar with the Scriptures. They heard them every Sabbath day. The synagogues were raised up that they might not be ignorant of any part of the law or the prophets. Why then remind them of that which they were so little likely to forget, of that which was the great excuse for their self-gratulation ?

As I have often had occasion to observe before, the Jews in the provinces, like the Jews in their capital city, might be in no danger of forgetting that they were unlike other people, might be in the greatest danger of forgetting that God had chosen them to be what they were, had marked them out as His people, to do a work for Him. The Scriptures, no doubt, repeated that doctrine in every page. It was the leading maxim in the books of Moses ; it was the subject of the discoveries of every prophet to his own generation. But that it was written in letters, that

it might be read out of a book, did not make it more a belief in the heart of the Jew than it had done when it had been spoken by Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. The book became the substitute for the truth of which the book spoke. They clung to it. They had the divine *oracles*. But the divine *Person*, the God of their fathers, was He their God? To bring Him before the men of Israel, and those who had become proselytes of the men of Israel, was no superfluous task, no announcement of a commonplace. They were the newest tidings that could be told to them. New they ought to be for each age; new each morning. ‘God, the Living God, chose your fathers; you have the sign of His covenant upon you; you are members of the elect race; you are under His government, bound to do what He sets you to do; heirs of His promises.’

St. Paul takes up their history at the time when they became a nation. They had been brought with a high hand out of Egypt. God made Himself known to them as their deliverer out of the house of bondage; by that name they were to know Him and to worship Him throughout all generations. They were strangers; they were slaves. Moses might sigh over their misery, but he could do nothing to relieve it. He might slay an Egyptian; he did but strengthen the tyranny by such lawless acts. He might try to make Israelites feel that they were brethren; his efforts at reconciliation only increased their strife and turned it against him. The Shaker of thrones, the Redeemer, the Reconciler, must be another than the leader whom they saw going in and out among them, than the law-giver who declared to them the statutes which they were to keep. If they confessed no other Judge,

Redeemer, Reconciler, than he was, they could not be a free people—in no real sense a people at all ; they would long again for the flesh-pots of Egypt ; they would create for themselves new oppressors. The next passage in the speech brings this fact before them. It gathers up one great portion of their sacred records.

“ And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.”

‘ You remember,’ he says, ‘ the story of the journey to Canaan. You remember to what the murmurings and rebellions of your tribes are referred. They would not believe that God had brought them out of Egypt ; that He did care for them ; that He was ruling over them. They were impatient of the trials of freemen ; they sighed for bondage. And you remember that God is said to have felt their distrust and unkindness, to have borne with it, by a series of punishments and of mercies to have contended with it.’ The doctrine is written in sunbeams on the book which they prized most. But to believe it ; to think that the Highest of all, the Creator of heaven and earth, does not dwell in a solitary, selfish happiness ; that He seeks the confidence of His creatures ; that He feels their distrust and alienation ; that as He has given them wills, He seeks to bring them into harmony with His own,—this was not easy for those men of Israel, and for them that feared God in Pisidia. Was not this to make God in the likeness of men—the very thing which the heathens did, and which they were warned not to do ? Was it not to diminish His sovereignty and His awfulness ? Yet they could not say that this teaching was not to be found in the very commandment which forbade them to make Him in the likeness of anything in heaven

above or the earth beneath. They could not say that the I Am, the dreadful God, had not declared Himself the God who saw the affliction of His people and heard their cry.

St. Paul condensed the story of the book of Joshua into the next sentence, as he had condensed the four books of Moses into the two first.

“ And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.”

He destroyed the nations; he divided the land by lot. Certainly that was the language of the book. But was it real language? Was it not an artificial, pious phraseology? Did not Joshua conquer the Canaanites? Did not he portion out their land? Nine out of ten, we may be sure, in that synagogue thought so generally; only now and then the question will have flashed through their minds—‘What, are not our books true? Do not they say what they mean? Are we the subjects of a regular, habitual imposition?’ St. Paul stood there mainly to give an answer to this question. ‘Your books are not false; they do say what they mean. It is God who subdues nations, who punishes them when the cup of their iniquities is full. It is God who gives nations the lands which they possess. If they think that they got the lands in possession by their own swords, if they think that they held the lands by their own strength, or for their own virtue, they will not feel that they have any trust to exert for the lands; they will turn them to their own selfish use; they will become corrupters and oppressors like those who were before them. Just so far as your fathers, men of Israel, believed that the righteous God

was their ruler, and that in war or peace they were acting as His ministers, just so far were they able to be an orderly and wise people ; when they forgot this, the gods of the tribes round about them became their masters, and they sank into miserable thralls.'

That is the moral of the book to which St. Paul next refers them.

" And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet."

The language of the apostle is, you see, consistent. He gave them judges. They were raised up from time to time, when the nation was smarting under some tyranny which it had brought upon itself, by stooping to consult idols as witnesses for the Unseen Saviour and Judge. How weak and foolish they were in themselves the historian is careful to point out ; except so far as they set forth one who broke the yoke of the oppressor, who made the right prevail, they were good for nothing.

" And afterward they desired a king : and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years." That craving which Moses had said would arise in their hearts did arise. They wanted a permanent ruler, not a mere succession of occasional rulers. The craving indicated, we are told, unbelief in the invisible King. Yet it was to be gratified. And the invisible Ruler is said to *give* the visible king, who forgot Him and became an oppressor. Saul was a witness for the presence and government of a righteous Lord as much by the end of his reign as by the beginning of it ; as much by his madness and his resort to dark powers as by his faith

and obedience. The nation stood in God's calling, not in the faith or goodness of its rulers. That faith and goodness must be in His calling and covenant. Take the calling away—suppose the covenant not to be well ordered and sure—the faith and goodness have no foundation ; they point to nothing ; they are nothing.

So the next verse declares : “ And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king ; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.”

There you have the meaning of David's life, and of David's psalms. He does not find the Lord God of Israel, but the Lord God of Israel finds him ; takes him to be the shepherd of Israel, endues him with all faculties for that office. The man after God's own heart confesses his vocation, yields himself to perform it, believes that God will enable him to perform it. God has set up His king—the battle is His. To Him David must commit himself and his cause. It is not, in fact, his cause. The people of Israel are God's sheep, the under-shepherd is, in all his ways, to keep them in mind of that fact ; to set it forth in his own watchfulness over them. That shepherd of the people had shown himself an imperfect shepherd. But the promise of a King, of a real King after His own heart, of a perfect Deliverer, had been the promise on which all righteous men had lived. That promise, says St. Paul, has been fulfilled.

“ Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.”

St. Paul as much as St. Peter announces Jesus to his hearers as a King, as a King of Israel. When he

adds “a Saviour,” he does not lose sight of the other name. The Jews looked for a King who should be their Saviour from the yoke of their oppressors. They thought the Roman the heaviest yoke—if they fancied they could throw off that without being raised from another, that was a mistake of which they needed to be cured. “When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.” John preached, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He was the herald of a King, of the only King his countrymen sought for, the King of Israel. Only he came with a baptism for all the people of Israel, with a message that God offered deliverance from a tyranny nearer, closer, more terrible than the Cæsar’s—one which all alike were groaning under, if they had ever so little hope of office, if they paid ever so little tribute; one which affected the vitals of the nation and of every man—that inward corruption which made outward oppression inevitable. This call to publicans and soldiers to turn to the righteous God from whom they were turning away; this witness that sent away the sins from their consciences which they could not throw off, was the necessary step to the Revelation of the Eternal King, the passage from the Old Testament to the New. “And,” therefore, “as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.”

The preaching of John had discovered strange mysteries to many who heard it. There was a Kingdom of Heaven, a Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Righteousness, near to them. They were living under

it, but they did not know it. There was a Light of God shining about them, shining into them, revealing the thoughts and intents of their hearts. They had been blind to it ; the darkness within them had not comprehended it. Now they could bear to think of the Kingdom ; now they could turn round to the Light and ask that it might penetrate them. What a wonderful man must he be who had told them these things ! Must he not be the person they were wanting, the Christ who was promised ? ‘No !’ he answered, ‘I am not He. There is One coming after me, of whom I am only the dying witness ; the King of this Heavenly Kingdom, the actual Light of men. His shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.’

And now there comes the full Gospel of this King of Israel, the full declaration of this Light.

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.” ‘I have claimed you, the inhabitants of a distant province, as fellow-citizens of the race, as heirs of this salvation that has been promised. Now I will tell you what that salvation is, though the heads and religious guides of your people have, in the completest way, rejected it.’

“For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.” The rulers of Jerusalem did not recognize their King. They could not see that Jesus of Nazareth was such a King, was manifesting the mind of such a King, was doing the acts of such a King as the prophets—to whom they listen so regularly, to whom they bow so reverently

—were testifying of. But the prophets were right. They said that the highest King and Prophet, like all that had been before Him, would be rejected and despised by those highest in the land. They had said that God's purpose would be accomplished through that rejection. And so it has been. "And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre."

All that Jews could do to get rid of the King was done; all that Gentiles could do was done. He was actually put to death. He was actually buried.

"But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he whom God raised again saw no corruption."

The promises to David—the promise of a King to be of his house—are here connected with the message of the Resurrection. You remember that

it was the same in St. Peter's speech at the day of Pentecost. The 16th Psalm is quoted by both apostles; both dwell on the fact that David had been laid in the sepulchre and had not appeared out of it, that the words about a body not seeing corruption could not apply to him. For the apostles never for a moment told their countrymen that they were not right in expecting a King. They never spoke to them, as we often speak, of the danger of supposing that He was a temporal Prince. They held that He was a King in the largest, fullest sense that could be given to the word. He was not so poor and paltry a King as the Cæsar. He had dominion over the bodies and spirits of men. He could send away diseases, conquer the powers of evil, give life. Such a King the Jews recognized. He was the kind of King they sought for. But could He overcome His own enemies? Apparently He could not. The moment the chief priests and the rulers stretched forth their hands against Him, He succumbed. The betrayer was successful. The Sanhedrim found the victory over the people, which was believed to be so dangerous, an easy one. The most ignominious of all deaths could not be averted. He saved others, Himself He could not save. This was the confutation of His pretensions as a King. *The Christ* in the law was to abide always. This Christ had, as He foretold, been given up to die. *The Son of David* was to have the sure mercies of David, to win a triumph which he had never won. This Son of David had suffered calamities which no subject of David, no Ammonite or Philistine whom David had passed under harrows and axes, had suffered. 'The argument,' said the apostles, 'is true, if God did not

raise Him from the dead. If death had dominion over Him, if His flesh did see corruption, we give up our assertion that the King has come. We must look for another. A king who cannot conquer death—who cannot subdue that enemy—wants the credential which the perfect King must have. Our message therefore to the world, one which we leave to confute itself or to prove itself, to be rejected as a ridiculous and blasphemous fable or to be received as the deliverance of mankind from its horrors, is that He has died and gone into the grave and hell, and that He has risen again in the glory of His Father and been exalted to His right hand.' This King and Conqueror, not some theory or scheme of salvation, they held forth to the belief and hopes first of their countrymen, then through them of the human race.

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." 'Just as really as forgiveness is sent from any human father through a brother, just so really is forgiveness sent to you all from your Father in heaven, through this your Brother and Head.' But is that all ?

"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Throughout his speech St. Paul has been speaking of God as doing all things for men, as calling the Israelites, appointing their rulers, giving David to them to be their king, raising up the Son of David from the grave. He does not depart from his principles here. He does not suppose men to be their own justifiers. He does not contradict his own ex-

press language in the Epistle to the Romans, "It is God that justifieth." But he says, as in that epistle, that it is by believing or trusting in that King, whom God has revealed to men as their righteous Lord, that men rise out of evils from which the law that prohibits could never raise them; attain a righteousness which the law that enjoins righteousness could never give them. Throughout his sketch of Jewish history St. Paul has been proclaiming a Just God who, because He is a Just God, is a Saviour. That was the revelation to the Israelites when they were brought out of Egypt. That is the final revelation in the King who dies and rises again to break in pieces the bonds of sin and death.

"Beware therefore," he says, "lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." I have taken these words as the text of my sermon for two reasons. The first is, that they seem to me to explain better than any the object of St. Paul's whole discourse, the position of the apostle, and the critical moment in Church history which was at hand. What had the whole history of the Old Testament signified? Was it anything or nothing? Had it spoken of a King who was to reign over men or not? If it had not, let them say so frankly, and renounce all the hopes upon which they had lived. Then let them say: 'There is no reason why we should be different from the heathen about us. We have no witness to bear to the world.' But if they believed in their calling, if they retained their

hopes, then let them consider solemnly whether Jesus had not shown forth the purpose of their calling, whether He was not the fulfilment of their hopes. If He was, there were terrible words in their old book which would be fulfilled to the nation which had despised its King and Deliverer. It would wonder and perish.

No such strong word had been spoken yet ; stronger were to be spoken. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath." Such words about a King of men, a Deliverer from the death which overtakes all men, could not be merely for Jews. All of us must have a right in them. It was a new demand, a step to union from the heathen side. Yet the Jews wished for proselytes ; how could they refuse that strangers should hear of their high privileges, should honour their God ? "Many of the Jews and religious proselytes," we are told, "followed Paul and Barnabas." They had understood for the first time in what God they had believed, how true the words of their Scriptures were. The apostles, it is said, "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." They were not to change their profession. They were to hold it fast. They were to see what it involved. They were to confess that the grace which was shown to their forefathers was with them ; that the longings of their forefathers had not been disappointed. "And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and

Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." The full force of that great declaration is to be learnt from the history that follows. I have quoted it because it was the necessary sequel to the threatening sentence of which I spoke before. It contains the second reason which I had for fixing your thought upon that sentence.

Why did St. Paul call his countrymen "despisers" ? Why were they to "wonder and perish" ? We talk of God punishing the Jews for their unbelief. Assuredly He did punish them. The punishment was that they ceased to be a nation of witnesses for a merciful and righteous God; that they sank into a nation of witnesses for a cruel God, that they became the servants of Mammon. No worse calamity came upon them than this, no worse could come. To honour a false God, instead of a true; to be without the belief of a King who has conquered death, and who has revealed a Father in heaven, who binds men to Him and to each other—oh, brethren, is there any punishment like this? May it not come upon those who have succeeded to a nobler calling, to a higher covenant than that of Israel? Will it not come, if they do not acknowledge that calling as one to testify to the ends of the earth that they have a King who died for them, and rose again; a Father who loves mankind ?

XIX.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(30th March, 1862.)

“And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.”—Acts xiv. 11.

PAUL and Barnabas had charged the Jews in Pisidia with putting the Word of God from them, and judging themselves unworthy of eternal life. The expression sounds strange to us. Was this the fault of Jews, there or anywhere, that they thought too meanly of themselves? Is not their self-righteousness that which we chiefly object to them?

My friends! I conceive the Jews did think too meanly of themselves. That they thought too meanly of themselves was the main cause of their self-righteousness. And, again, their self-righteousness kept down their thoughts to the low level which they had attained; yes, and depressed them continually to a lower. If they had estimated what their capacities were, what they might ask for and expect, as creatures made in the image of God, they could not have been content with their own righteousness; they could not have made that the measure for other men.

The standard of their country, their age, their class, was the highest they could dream of. Very soon the sect standard—the Sadducean or Pharisaic standard—was counted much higher than the standard which belonged to the Israelite; very soon each man brought his own individual standard to be the rule for his sect. Hence a perpetual deterioration; hence each age, each year, less of aspiration after good, a more easy acquiescence in habits that were not good, that were positively evil.

The message of the apostles to the Jews was: 'God has called you to a knowledge of Himself. God has called you to be righteous as He is righteous. If you believe that, you will desire that He should reveal Himself to you; that He should show you what His Righteousness is. We announce to you that He has revealed Himself; that He has shown us what His Righteousness is in His Son Jesus Christ. We announce to you that the Eternal Life, the life of the Eternal God, has been manifested to us, and that we may claim it as our life. For this He chose your fathers—for this He has been preparing you. Do not despise His calling! Do not determine that you will not have that which He freely gives you! Do not affect the miserable modesty of saying that you are unworthy of the life without which you cannot do the works which He commands you to do! But if you do thus scorn the divine blessing, if you will not know the human blessing, lo! we turn to the Gentiles. The gift is for them also; God will not withhold it from them.'

St. Luke adds—"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

The word “ordained” is used in that old etymological sense in which it very well represents the import of the original. Those Gentiles that were marshalled in the direction of eternal life—those who, as St. Paul expresses it in the Epistle to the Romans, by patient continuance in well-doing, are seeking for glory—*had* eternal life. Those who, like Cornelius, coveted the knowledge of God, and like him shared the blessings they had received with their fellow-creatures, these believed when they were told of a divine Life which had been shown forth in acts of goodness to the sons of men. The news of such a Life was the highest and best they could receive. And many who did not yield themselves heartily and entirely to that life, who did not perceive that everything was worth parting with for the sake of it, might nevertheless feel great gladness when they were assured that there was One who had exhibited such a life to men, when they were asked to confess Him as the true Son of God.

But there arose a kind of opposition which we shall often hear of in this book, and which we ought to consider carefully, if we would know the history of the Church in the earliest or the latest time. “The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.” Nothing is said to disparage the characters or the motives of these persecutors. The word “devout” at once fixes them as people who had more than ordinary regard for religion and its services. They might be devout proselytes who frequented the synagogues, and went when they could to Jerusalem.

They might be devout heathens, punctual in offering all appointed and many voluntary sacrifices on their country's altar. The word "honourable" denotes them to have had a high position in the eyes of their fellow-citizens, to be of the creditable class. The foremost among them were women with much religious sensibility, no doubt; feeling the absence of it in their husbands and brothers; easily aroused to suspicion of any who might weaken it still further. They would find it not difficult to rouse the chief men of the city against those who were disturbing old traditions, and at the same time dangerously appealing to the sympathy of the common people. Thus a dislike beginning in the animosity of Jews to Gentiles,—in the sense of the exclusive privileges of the race, and in contempt of all people but themselves,—might easily be communicated to the very men whom the apostles were claiming as fellow-heirs and of the same body with them. The feeling of caste in the Jew, and the feeling of caste in the heathen, though it might keep them apart from each other, would make them common enemies of those who were striking at the root of caste prejudices, who had a message which levelled all and elevated all.

The apostles, we are told, 'shook off the dust of their feet and went to Iconium.' That sign which expressed to other Jews a sense of contempt for other people, a determination not to be polluted by the earth which they trod, became for the apostles the witness against exclusiveness, against the refusal of the common Lord of all men. That act of theirs declared to the devout and honourable women, to the chief men of the city, and still more to the rulers of the synagogue and the

children of Abraham generally, that the kingdom of God had come near to them, that they had been invited to take their places in it, and that they would not, because the Head of the kingdom had stooped to the estate of beggars and sinners, had claimed them also as inheritors of it. That which had happened at Antioch happened again in Iconium. There the apostles still seek out their countrymen, still go first into the synagogue. If they have turned to the Gentiles, they have not in the least turned from their own standing ground. They say that it is a ground for all ; they have no dream of discovering one which is wider and more human. They so speak in the synagogue "that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed." No compromise has been effected between them ; there has been no half-way house of meeting. As messengers of the God of Abraham, Paul and Barnabas come to bless all the families of the earth. And therefore, as before, the elements of discord in each race combine against them. "The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." The bitterness begins with those who called Jesus a blasphemer and a friend of sinners. Left to themselves, the Gentiles would never have interfered with a Jewish sect. If it put forth any novel opinions, the Greeks might have listened to them with curiosity, the Romans with tolerance and contempt. But this Jewish sect would not leave either Jews or Gentiles to their separation, contempt, and hatred. The teacher of it spoke of a union in a divine King, the present Lord, the Friend of all men.

" Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in

the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

That is to say, they spoke of Jesus as the gracious Lord, the Source of grace to men. And He showed that He was that which they declared Him to be. He enabled them to do acts of grace to men ; to make them feel that an invisible Helper, the Source of grace and life, the Enemy of disease and death, was near. This was the message of their acts ; thus they made the message that went forth from their lips intelligible. If they had been ungracious acts, though ever so strange, they would *not* have confirmed it ; if they had been such acts of grace as led men to dwell on the visible agent they would not have confirmed it ; if they had been such acts of grace as led men to think that the invisible Author of them was capricious, uncertain, irregular in His graciousness, they would not have confirmed it. It was a grace, a grace always the same in the Giver, towards whomsoever it was at the moment displayed, which conquered human hearts ; that only. And, therefore, these apostles' acts and their preaching had just that mixed effect which gracious acts and preaching of good news have had in all times whatsoever. "The multitude of the city was divided : and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles." The word of grace spoke to something in the hearts of men which answered it, which owned it as divine. The declaration of the Jews that such grace was the mark of impostors or proceeded from devils, spoke to something in men's hearts which welcomed it. And that thing which responded to the Jewish language resorted then, as it ordinarily

resorts, to physical force. That is its proper weapon. "There was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them."

They fly, as they had been bidden by their Master. They come into a district over which the Greek civilization had no doubt passed, but in which there remained much of the old barbarism. To these Lycaonians acts must have been far more intelligible than words.

"There sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked." This all would call a miracle. We have heard of others—of one like this at the Beautiful gate of the Temple—why should this be recorded? All would say, for the sake of what follows. Let us consider what that is.

The cry is raised immediately in the popular dialect of the place—"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." What an old, venerable faith spoke there! How all past history illustrates the might and depth of it! How it is brought back to us by every fresh light we gain respecting races which are ruled by our own English sceptre! Beneficial helpers of men must be divine. They must be incarnations of some great Deliverer. The most godlike work must be surely to cure human miseries, to redress human wrongs. Out of such thoughts have come, we all know, the consecration of priestly impostures, the

growth of the darkest and deadliest superstitions. ‘ Yet, can you afford to part with them ? ’ asks the man who is hovering on the borders of truth and falsehood, who is doubting whether he may not avail himself of the worship of the people to produce some good results, to give them lessons which they would not receive if they reverenced him less.

It was exactly the temptation to which Paul and Barnabas were exposed at Lystra.

“ They called Barnabas, Jupiter ; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.” ‘ Why not ? ’ their teachers might have said. ‘ What harm if they do give us names which we regard as nothing ? Is it not true that God has come down in the likeness of a man ? May we not lead them by degrees from ourselves to Him ? ’

“ Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.” ‘ Well,’ the evil spirit will have whispered, ‘ and have these poor creatures ever offered sacrifices to such good beings, to such real benefactors before ? Why not let them have their way ? If you hinder them, may they not lose all sense of that union between the divine and human, which it is your special business to teach ? ’ Oh, how often have such suggestions been made to the mind of great doctors and missionaries of the Church, and in different ages of its history ! And how often have doctors and missionaries yielded to the suggestion !

“ Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things ? We also are men of like passions with you,

and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This was indeed a good reason for letting us hear of that miracle to the impotent man at Lystra. For have we not here the grandest rebuke ever pronounced against the use that Christians have made of miracles—the grandest testimony to their purpose and meaning? That act of grace to the one cripple was a sign, not of the power of this Paul and this Barnabas, but of Him who made the heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that is therein, and who, in every age, had been bearing witness of Himself to His creatures, by doing them good. All rains and fruitful seasons had been charged with the same message, with which this act of healing was charged. All had spoken of the same Being. All had spoken of Him as caring for His creatures—even for those whom He suffered to walk in their own ways. They, as little as those whom He took under His special government, were forgotten by Him. They were not without revelations, continual revelations, of His mind and character, of His feelings towards them.

‘Oh !’ some will say, ‘but here is no message concerning Christ. St. Paul only speaks of a God of nature, a God who sends rain from heaven and fruitful seasons.’ No message concerning Christ, certainly ; if Christ did not speak truly when He said : ‘ My Father

worketh hitherto, and I work,' and 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' No message concerning Christ, if Christ did not come to do the will of Him that sends rain upon the just and the unjust, upon the good and the evil, and to finish His work. No message concerning Christ, if Christ did not come into the world that He might redeem the savages of Lycaonia, and all men, from the service of evil powers, or of powers half evil and half good, that He might bring them into the kingdom of Him who is Light, in whom is no darkness. But a wonderful message concerning Christ, if He offered the perfect sacrifice which made all attempts to propitiate powers of nature or powers of darkness for ever monstrous and impossible, if His sacrifice was one which perfectly satisfied and delighted His Father, because it is the image of His own perfect goodness. If that is so, the apostle was never more witnessing of Christ than when he was turning men from their vanities—from their own notions of God, half earthly, half heavenly, mixed with sin and death, to the Living God, the source of life to all things; the giver of the truest, highest hope to man. If that is so, this discourse is a most striking specimen of the power which a true Israelite, educated to worship the One God whom no man had seen or could see, had in speaking to the Gentiles who were bowing before visible gods, provided he did not put that God at a distance from His human creatures, provided he thoroughly believed that there was a Man in whom the divine goodness had fully come forth, provided he accepted the doctrine that the signs of the divine Presence are acts of grace to all kinds of men. Let the Jew stoop in one point to heathenism, and he

became unfit to teach heathens, incapable of meeting the wants they are conscious of, or of raising them to the perception of higher wants. Let the Jew believe that all men in all times have been under the care of the God of His fathers—that he and all men may count themselves worthy of eternal life, because “the wise man” is not to “glory in his wisdom,” nor “the mighty man . . . in his might,” nor “the rich man . . . in his riches,” but are to glory in knowing Him who exerciseth “loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness on the earth”—and he becomes an apostle to the Gentiles, the herald of light and salvation to the world. St. Paul was never so thoroughly a Jew as when he was preaching to the heathen of Lycaonia, and we shall never be thoroughly Christians, and we shall never restrain any people from doing sacrifice to false gods, till we accept the sacrifice of Christ as the full manifestation of the love of the Living God, till we believe that the God who revealed Himself perfectly in the Cross of His Son is He who reveals Himself every day in sunshine and in shower, in every act which fills any human heart with food and gladness.

XX.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

(6th April, 1862.)

“And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”—Acts xv. 1.

THE apostles had been learning two lessons—one, that there was something in all kinds of men to which their message addressed itself, and which responded to it; the other, that there was something in all kinds of men which it exasperated, and which hated them as the deliverers of it. Civilized men and savages, heathens and Jews, had welcomed them as heralds of a Deliverer in their words and their acts. Civilized men and savages, heathens and Jews, were ready to drive them out of their cities. They had been worshipped as gods in Lystra. But “there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” We are not told the method of persuasion. It was probably very simple, suited to the faculties of the people for whom it was intended. ‘This Paul and this Barnabas are no doubt enchanters. They must have

cured the cripple by traffic with some bad powers. Would it not be well to take vengeance upon them ? ' The Jew satisfied his own desire to treat them as blasphemers by suggesting the punishment which his law had fixed for that crime. The poor idolaters will have bowed to his superior wisdom. The vengeance was not to take effect ; St. Paul's hour was not come. He recovered from that violence, as men recover from sharp or lingering disorders to which they might have looked for their dismissal, when God has more work for them in this world. " As the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city : and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

The popular fury, like the popular admiration, in the Asiatic cities, may have been spent, for we are told that " when they had preached the gospel " in Derbe, " and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

The language of the apostles is still the same with that of our Lord Himself, and of His forerunner. The Kingdom of God was preached by one as much as the other. It was preached as a Kingdom which was nigh at hand. Jews were called by John to repent because it was nigh at hand ; to receive the baptism which declared that God sent away their sins. Jews were called by Jesus and the apostles whom He sent into their villages to repent because it was at hand, because it had actually come to them, because it was manifesting itself in life-giving power on their bodies and their spirits. Jews were told by St. Peter and

the apostles that Jesus had been proclaimed Lord of this Kingdom by rising from the dead, and that He had sent forth His Spirit to bring men into it and to keep them members of it. Now Jews and Gentiles had heard from Barnabas and Paul of this Kingdom. They had believed that there was such a Kingdom. They had been signed with the sign of baptism as the subjects of it. And yet the apostles, while confirming their souls, while urging them to continue in the faith, tell them they must through much tribulation enter into this Kingdom. Did they then use the word in a double sense? Did they understand something by it now which they did not understand before?

I think they never used words in double senses, and that such double senses greatly interfere with the sincerity of our minds. The Kingdom of God was never, for them, merely a Kingdom in the future, or in the present, or in the past. It was the Kingdom of Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Eternal Kingdom. They could speak of it as surrounding men, and as acting upon them when they were most unaware of its presence, when they were most trying to live independent of it. They could exhort them to enter into it, in very deed to act as if they were citizens of it. They might say to them, 'You would not enter into it, you would stay outside of it, refusing its mild yoke, submitting to the tyranny of its enemies, if great tribulations did not break down your pride, if you were not driven to feel that you needed to be directed by a divine Ruler, to be moulded anew by a divine Spirit. By various processes of discipline, chosen by One who knows what we want, and who will not spare the rod for our crying, are we

brought into consent with our own blessedness, are we made to prefer that which is best for us.' Such was the doctrine which the apostles preached in Asia Minor, and which has been confirmed by 1800 years of experience in all countries since.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

Individuals might profess a religion ; only a society of men could bear witness for the existence of a Kingdom. But if they bore witness of that, they could not be a sect drawn together by similarity of opinions, even by attachment to a person. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," is the grand maxim of the Christian commonwealth, the one which those who proclaimed it to the world had always to bear in mind. They clung as much as they could to their nation, because it was a nation chosen and called out by God, not a sect or school fashioned to express the conclusions of human intellects. The nation was the protection against Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes ; it comprehended all the sheep, even the lost sheep, of the House of Israel. But the nation refusing its King was changing itself into a sect or a collection of sects. It was necessary that there should be a body confessing the King, declaring that there was no social unity, no life for any man apart from Him. Such a body rose up in every city in which the Gospel was preached and received. It could only be described by the old name as *Ecclesia*, a body called out ; a body which God had established, not Paul or Barnabas, or any apostle. Over each of such bodies the apostles ordained elders or presbyters. The name was not of their invention.

It was derived from the institutions of their country. It at once recalled that part of the Jewish commonwealth which Moses had adopted at the suggestion of the priest of Midian, his father-in-law, believing that his oracle was a wise and divine one. But the name went back further still. Elders were no mere State officials. They spoke of family life, of the reverence for age, of that sanctity which one people as much as another could appreciate. The apostles were providing for the wants of a community mixed of Jews and heathens. This title spoke alike to both of that which was not more artificial than the trees or the flowers ; which was as much related to the history of man as it belonged to the nation. To ordain elders with prayer and fasting was to witness that they regarded the Church as a permanent society, to be continued from age to age, but as God's and not theirs ; the men who ministered it being His ministers, the stewards of His mysteries ; the Husbandman Himself dwelling in the midst of them, and calling them to account for that which they dispensed. Therefore, they commended the Church, not chiefly, or ultimately, to the elders, but "to the Lord, on whom they believed."

And now the purpose of their mission is becoming far clearer to themselves than it was at first. They had intended to tell their countrymen that the King who was promised to their fathers had come ; they had hoped to find some open ears and hearts among them. They could not hinder men of other nations from looking upon the Gospel to the Jews as a Gospel to them, from doing homage to the Son of David. They were but a few members of the synagogues, a few Greeks or Romans, or Orientals, who acknowledged

Jesus to be the Christ, the Anointed of God, the Head of men. But those few must be taking up the true human ground, must be renouncing that which set them at war with each other. There must be in their fellowship a principle of expansion which could have no limits. To show, therefore, what foundation was laid for a universal society, and how each community in each city, without losing its own characteristics or altering any of its outward circumstances, might become an integral portion of the Universal Society—this was the function of the apostles. To acquit themselves of this function, “after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia.” And then—because concentration is no less important than diffusion, because it would have been a fatal error not to remind the Churches of their duties and relations to each other, because in Syria had been the first example of a united society of Jews and Gentiles—they “sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.”

And then began the earliest of the controversies that have been waged in the Christian Church. The earliest, and certainly not the least important, if you consider what it implied, and how many seeds of later disputes were contained within it.

“Certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after

the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." This was the language of these Jerusalem Christians to the heathen converts in the Antioch Church. It declared that they had no right to a place in the Church, as Gentiles. They must become Jews. The Church must be just what the synagogue was. It must stand on the glory and election of the Israelite race. Proselytes might be tolerated members of it. All that Barnabas and Paul had done then was wrong. Every step they had taken must be retraced. That those apostles should have "no small dissension and disputation" with men who announced such a maxim as this was natural. Yet, if we refer the events which are spoken of in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians to this time—and there is no time, I think, to which they can be as well referred—we must suppose that Peter, when he came to Antioch, felt the force of the arguments of those who desired to preserve the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, and practically yielded to them; nay, that Barnabas himself was for a time carried away with them. How St. Paul resisted them—why they seemed to him most terrible—is evident from that passage, and from the whole of the epistle of which it forms a part. He did not look at the question as only or chiefly concerning the Gentiles. It was fatal to him, a Jew. If the doctrine of these Jerusalem teachers was sound, he must stand upon his Jewish separation; he must claim to be better than others in virtue of his circumcision. But all such grounds for confidence had been taken from him. He had been shown that in himself he was a sinner as much as any Gentile. He had been shown that in Christ only he had any

righteousness, any life, any union with God. If that was true for him, it was true for all men. If it was not true for all men, it was not true for him. His practical discipline had taught St. Paul the meaning and might of God's covenant with his fathers and with him. It was not devised to glorify them. It was not devised to cut off other men. It taught them that there was in themselves that which God hated, and which they were to hate. It taught them that God called them, and separated them from that which is bad and accursed in themselves, to be His servants. They were grand and noble as a nation, for they were adopted by Him. They were foul and evil, when they forgot they were members of a nation and lived to themselves. This principle of circumcision was everlastingly and universally true. All were good, when redeemed and converted to God's service and use. All were vile, when they strove to be servants of themselves and of visible things. The circumcision which was external in the flesh might be good for those who had inherited it, if they understood its meaning; otherwise it was worthless. When they enforced it upon others, they subverted its meaning, they gave it a lying signification, they made it into a curse.

These are the doctrines which are presented to us under various aspects in St. Paul's epistles. The zeal and vehemency with which he asserts them will appear excessive to us, till we apply them in the struggles of our own lives, till we consider them in reference to the history of the Church. When we do, we shall understand his intolerance; we shall see what love was at the root of it; against what moral confusions, against what

narrowness and cruelty he is guarding us ; how inevitably we fall into them and the Church falls into them when his warnings and protests are overlooked. He was bearing the hatred of his countrymen generally, the cold looks and suspicions of his Christian brethren, that he might vindicate for us the truth that we are members of a called and holy family in Christ ; that he might claim for us the circumcision which is “made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” and putting on “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” ; that he might claim for us the right to be partakers of Christ’s body and blood, and so to be members of the communion of saints, of the household of God.

How this question of circumcision was discussed when Barnabas and Paul went up to Jerusalem we may consider hereafter. They did not anticipate the decision except by this practical answer : “They passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles.” God had bound the Gentiles to Himself, had taught them to trust in Him. That was more important to them than what men, though they were elders and apostles, might think of them. Shall we not sometimes say to ourselves : ‘ After all, that is the most important thing to us ; the opinions of men about us we may leave to Him, to be proved right or wrong in His great day ’ ?

XXI.

PALM SUNDAY.

(13th April, 1862.)

“And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.”—Acts xv. 6.

BARNABAS and Paul had come from Antioch to Jerusalem expressly to hear what the Church there had to say respecting the question, whether the Gentile converts should receive the sign of the Jewish covenant, should be brought under the terms of the Jewish law. Those “of the sect of the Pharisees which believed” were vehement on the side which was opposed to them. This was the matter which the apostles and elders came together to consider.

It is easy to imagine what arguments these Christians of the Pharisee sect would use. ‘All who did not receive the sign of the covenant were by God’s command to be cut off from the people. The stranger and the sojourner were to be treated like the home-born. When had the law been repealed? Had Christ repealed it? Had we not submitted to it? Was it to be set aside specially in favour of men who had been spending their lives as idolaters? Who wanted

it so much? Was it not the witness and protection against idolatry, the seal of men's attachment to the true God?

Such considerations as these must have had great weight with apostles and elders trained in the law of the fathers, dwelling in the holy city, visiting the Temple daily. Barnabas and Paul might discover an answer to them. Would not such an answer look very feeble beside their habitual impressions, their most deeply-rooted convictions? Simon Peter, especially if he had not given proof recently of his dread of Gentile contamination, must at least have felt that his call was to the circumcision. Will he not have deemed it the safer course, if not the absolutely necessary one, to enforce it upon the whole body of believers in Christ?

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

This apostle of the circumcision — whose name reminded him that the Church stands upon a rock, who was told that he should have the keys of the kingdom of heaven—does not then think the course which the advocates of circumcision recommend a safe one. He dares not sanction it. He uses, you see,

very strong language indeed. He seems to disparage circumcision now as a Jewish institution. He speaks of it as imposing a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. What can he mean? Has the recent experience of Barnabas and Saul overturned all his previous belief?

He rests nothing upon that experience. He refers merely to his own. A good while ago—literally in old days (for though the Church was still young, according to ordinary computation, so much had befallen it, so many changes were occurring to it every day, that the conversion of Cornelius might be looked back upon as a long past transaction)—a good while ago God chose him out, that Gentiles by his mouth should hear and believe. He cannot depart from the language of his fathers. God chose him. He did not go of himself; he was sent. And if he spoke by God's command, if the good news was God's, it was He who opened the ears of the Roman centurion to hear the news, his heart to entertain the news. And God, according to His promise, gave the Spirit to these Gentiles, and made it evident by a sign that He had given them the Spirit. All this he had rehearsed to them before. All this they knew. It comes now to Peter as the real, all-sufficient answer to the reasonings about circumcision. God knows men. His grace saves these heathens out of their idolatry and darkness. His grace saves us out of our idolatry and darkness. Can we stand upon any other ground than that on which they stand? If we take up another, must it not be a weaker ground? What! we have some resting-place besides the grace of God that is revealed in Christ? And circumcision is that resting-

place? Was it so to our fathers? Did it keep them from falling into idolatry? So far as it was separated from the grace of God, was it not a mere weight upon their necks, which did not raise them but depressed them?

What a wonderful truth revealed itself at that moment to the apostle! How that truth explained the virtue of the ordinance which it seemed to vilify! Circumcision, and all such ordinances as witness of God's living grace, of His power over the heart, of His willingness to save men from their own downward tendency, were good and divine. Circumcision, yes, and the whole law of commandments contained in ordinances, looked at merely in itself, as something to be done only because it was prescribed and must be done, was a penalty and a curse, not lifting up the spirit of Jew or Gentile towards God, but putting it a further distance from God—an instrument of slavery, not of redemption.

When such a grand maxim as this had been enunciated by one whom the Jerusalem Church reverenced as one of its pillars, as its first preacher, "the multitude" were prepared to keep silence and give "audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." The greatest sign and wonder which had been wrought was assuredly this, that Gentiles had turned from dumb idols to serve the Living God. All subordinate signs and wonders, as we have seen, were for the purpose of showing that a Living God, the God who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and who had not left Himself without witness in that He did good, was working for the health and

salvation of their bodies and minds. Such signs and wonders helped to deliver them, and might help to deliver those to whom they were reported, from lying signs and wonders, from the worship of evil.

But there was an apostle who had never been sent on any mission to Gentiles ; whose place was strictly in Jerusalem ; who adhered to his country's customs, and was recognized now and at a later period as a righteous man in the full Jewish acceptation of the word ; some of whose disciples appear to have had a special dread of St. Paul's teaching. James might be expected to hold with the Pharisaical school in the Church, even if Peter, for any special reason, forsook them. The hopes of that party must have risen again after their late disappointment when he rose up.

“ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me : Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down ; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up : That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God ; But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled,

and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."

Here you have the words of a real student of the Law and Prophets, one who does not merely regard them as letters in a book, but who uses them to interpret the facts that are passing under his eyes. Simon Peter has spoken to Gentiles of a divine Kingdom. They have heard him. They have claimed their places as subjects of the divine Kingdom. Did not the prophets say that it must be so? Did all their language about David's throne, and the dominion it was to exercise, mean nothing? Did it not signify that the restoration of that which was decayed in the Jewish commonwealth would be attended with a victory over the Gentiles? If they held Jesus to be the Son of David, the King over them, must they not look for this promise to be accomplished in Him? Were not God's purposes known to Him from the first? Were they not gradually discovering themselves to the sons of men? St. James, therefore, regards the Gentiles as being intended to have a place in the divine society beside his own countrymen. He would not any more than St. Peter compel them to become Jews. That was not expressed or implied in the language which spoke of their sharing the same inheritance. But it was implied that they should avoid the moral evils of idolatry, against which the covenant of the Jew was a protest; it was implied that men admitted into a society should abstain from that which was offensive to the feelings of those who were in it before them. It was needful in direct language to tell the Gentiles of sins which had been

fostered rather than checked by the influence of their religion ; it was needful to tell them of certain acts which, though not wrong in themselves, would become wrong if they inflicted pain on their Jewish brothers. For their own sakes they should be told that they must abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication ; for the sake of their brothers' consciences they should abstain from things strangled, and from blood. Though the precepts are in themselves of very different importance and validity, they all become moral when they are connected with the peace and well-being of the Church ; with the sacrifices that every man is bound to make for the sake of his neighbours. In this sense St. Paul's epistles—especially that to the Corinthians—become a luminous and beautiful commentary upon these rules of St. James. His own observation, that Moses has in every city those that read him every Sabbath day, explains how the observance of the precepts would connect the history of the past with the present, the moral law with the Gospel which showed how it might be fulfilled.

“ Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas ; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren : And they wrote letters by them after this manner ; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia : Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep

the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." Then follow the four rules upon which they had agreed.

An epistle proceeding from Jews at Jerusalem and addressing Gentiles as our brethren must needs be a memorable document, if its other contents were unimportant. But they are of the highest importance. They are a grand vindication of Christian liberty and Christian unity. They show how much may be done to uphold Christian liberty and unity by men of very opposite tempers, with very different vocations, if they believe in a God of truth, and do not worship their own sect and opinion in place of God. The apostles to the Gentiles, the apostles to the Circumcision, see the question which is presented to them in different lights. Each of them sees it from his own point of view. But they arrive at a common result, at a more satisfactory result than any one of them by himself could have reached. It is not a compromise. The resolutions of St. James, whilst they asserted the use of the law permanently, as well as for that age, entirely ratified the doctrine of St. Paul, that the law could not interfere with the divine Grace and the divine Redemption. The Pharisaic school would have destroyed the work of the Old Testament in denying the largeness of the New. The apostles and elders, shaking

off the trammels of that school, were able to assert the one while defending the other.

This epistle has been sometimes said to contain the decrees of the first Ecclesiastical Council. St. Luke does not use that language. We should use it cautiously, noting carefully the differences between the Church before and after the fall of the Jewish polity. But I cannot reckon amongst these differences one upon which many Protestant writers insist. They complain of the arrogance and irreverence of later Councils for venturing to adopt the language of the apostles and elders of Jerusalem, and to claim the presence of the Holy Ghost in their deliberations. My friends, there was enough of arrogance and irreverence in the acts of many, perhaps most, of the Councils; but I cannot trace those sins to this faith. If they had cherished it really, instead of merely professing it, their arrogance and irreverence would have been changed for humility and awe. Then, like the assembly at Jerusalem, they would have risen above their local and individual prejudices, they would have been afraid to lay down rules which might fetter or divide the Church. They would have seen a divine purpose working itself out through changes of time and custom. They would have been anxious to vindicate that which is eternal and imperishable: they would have expected their own decrees, so far as they bore upon that which is local and temporary, to share the fate of that to which they related. I cannot but believe that in different ages the Holy Spirit has manifested His own presence in Councils composed in great measure of noisy, contentious partizans, by vindicating permanent and uniting truths

wanted for the community, from the subtleties of doctors who would have rent them asunder. But when those who had been permitted to assert those truths sought to sustain them by their fierce anathemas and vulgar persecutions, it is clear, I think, that they had lost their trust in the divine Teacher, and were filled with the most idle conceit of their wisdom and power, and supposed that not that which is, but that which they had decreed, would stand fast for ever. Oh ! if we would desire, in whatever deliberations as priests or laymen, to be indeed guided by that Holy Spirit to whom the apostles and elders of Jerusalem ascribed all just words and right thoughts, we should lay fewer yokes upon men's necks; we should be enabled sometimes to make them rejoice for our consolation.

Is the subject of which I have been speaking to you this morning a fit one for the first day in Passion Week ? I think it is. For all Christian ordinances may become what St. Peter said Jewish ordinances had become to those men and to their fathers—a yoke which cannot be borne. Passion Week and Good Friday may themselves become such a yoke. The cause is the same in both cases. When the old covenant and the old law were contemplated as means by which man was to make himself acceptable to God, or to rise towards God, they became loads upon the Spirit which it could in no wise lift. When we fancy that by some contemplation of our Lord's acts or sufferings we are able to recommend ourselves to God, or to rise nearer to Him, they become hindrances, weigh us down, and extinguish the light that is in us. When the old covenant and the old law were re-

garded as God's message to men, beginning and ending with the assurance, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the house of bondage," the Israelite rose up a new man, ready to do God's work, to run in the way of His commandments. When the death of Christ is regarded as the fruit of that tender love of God in giving His only-begotten Son, that he might take away our bondage and sin and make us partakers of His great humility, the cross becomes indeed the power of God to salvation, a redemption from death and hell. This is one reason why I am not desecrating Passion Week in speaking to you of this early controversy, and of the Council which settled it. And there is yet another. The bond of Jew and heathen, of the circumcised and the uncircumcised, is that cross which out of twain forms one new man, so making peace. Good Friday is the day on which we may speak, and do speak, of a love which surrounds Jews, Turks, Infidels, Heretics, and which we desire may conquer them and us.

XXII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(4th May, 1862.)

“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.”—Acts xv. 39.

WE have heard how the question of the necessity of circumcision for the Gentiles had been settled at Jerusalem. St. James and St. Peter had been brought to feel as strongly against the imposition of it as St. Paul. Their reverence for the Jewish covenant had been the cause of their agreement. It expressed a will and purpose of the Lord of all to choose men for His service. If He manifested His will and purpose to be that Gentiles should be His servants as well as Jews, that was the fulfilment of the covenant; to set up the terms of it against such evidence, was to deny the very truth on which it rested. In other words, the Pharisaical party, which wished to enforce circumcision upon the Gentile members of the Church, believed in it; the apostles believed in the Living God who had established it; they accepted it as the witness that He designed to set up His kingdom among men, and were therefore willing to confess

that He had set up his kingdom. Here is all the difference. We must never lose sight of it, for the meaning of the history depends upon it, the lessons of the history for all time to come depend upon it. The worship of ordinances and institutions destroyed the faith which ordinances and institutions embodied. Those who could not look above them had really no sense of their worth. Those who received them as messages from God saw in them a perpetual pledge of His presence, an assurance that His will could not be confined by the limitations which it had fixed for them. The Jew, if he indeed believed his law, was sure that his race was set to be a witness of God to all the families of the earth.

The work then which Barnabas and Paul had done in declaring a Gospel to the Gentiles, in treating Gentiles as called by God into the same fellowship with them, was admitted by the apostles of the circumcision to be a work which befitted them as Israelites, as children of the covenant. In proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Lord and Head of men, they had been fulfilling their national vocation. But it *was* a vocation. They must have been especially called to this work. They were not going on their own errand; they were not propagating any doctrine of theirs. If they were not God's messengers, if He had not sent them, their enterprise would prove ridiculous. It was no message at all. It was a shameful imposture. The world, Jewish and Gentile, said that it was. The world, Jewish and Gentile, would be proved right if they had spoken their own word, had assumed a commission which they had never received.

The Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, who had been named Christians, had taken the message concerning Jesus Christ as a message from God. They had believed that God had called them into a society, to bear witness of His Name and of His Grace to mankind. They had been shaken by the tidings that they could not look upon themselves as really called out by God, as really adopted by Him, till they had submitted to a separating Jewish rite. The tidings that the apostles recognized their calling and claimed them as brethren was naturally a comforting one. When they had read the epistle from Jerusalem, we are told in the 31st verse of this chapter, "they rejoiced for the consolation." It was easy to persuade men who felt how little good there was in them, what sinners they had been, that the news of God having adopted them was false news. It has been easy to do the like in all generations since. The difficulty is to convince men that they have a high calling; that they are not outcasts. Those who tell them they are, and bid them follow some schemes which they suggest, old or new, external or internal, for the purpose of establishing their title to the divine favour, will always find listeners and disciples, will always be able to exercise a great control over them. But the consolation is great, if they are told by men whom they revere and who they suppose may ratify the sentence against them, that they have a right to claim their places in God's household as His sons and daughters. This comfort the Church in Antioch received from the Church in Jerusalem. They felt themselves then to be indeed a Church. They had not deceived themselves. The calling of God did not depend upon their

acts. Their acts would be good or bad in proportion as they confessed it, and yielded themselves to the divine guidance.

The sense of unity was probably never stronger in the minds of Barnabas, and Paul, and Silas, than when they were teaching and preaching the word of the Lord to these men of different races and customs in Antioch. It was not only what they saw, though that was marvellous enough. The principle of Unity was here; what had been imperfectly realized in this small community of one city must be meant for the universe. They had already spoken of it in various parts of Asia Minor; their calling must be to speak of it in other towns and countries. But is it not strange that the very next report we hear should be not of unity, but of division; of division between the very men who are the heralds of peace and reconciliation to the world?

“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”

This passage has given occasion to many discourses on the infirmities of the best men, to many on the

dissolution of friendships. St. Luke does not linger over the first moral, he takes it for granted. Nor does he tell us whether his own friend and companion or Barnabas was the sharper in the contention. Very likely it was St. Paul. Barnabas has been described to us before as a good man. He had shown his goodness in giving up his land in Cyprus; in seeking to make Saul understood and recognized by those who suspected him at Jerusalem; in sympathizing with the Gentile Christians at Antioch, even before he could quite explain their position. This goodness was a divine gift, prompting all courageous and noble deeds. But beside it lay in him as in others, it would seem, that feeble, effeminate counterfeit which we call good nature; that quality which disposes to weak concession, to the tolerance of indifferent instruments, to the preference of kinsmen in tasks for which they have shown themselves incapable. It may sound absurd to talk of nepotism in men who could only promote their relatives to stripes and imprisonments; but the principle which Barnabas sanctioned, when he would have taken his sister's son with them after he had deserted them on the former journey, was the same with that which has wrought so much evil in all ages of the Church, though the material rewards were so different. He was preferring a man to a post of danger who might turn his back upon the enemy just when it behoved him to fight. I conceive that St. Paul may have been very sharp in rebuking what must have struck him as unfaithfulness to their cause and their invisible Captain. His righteous indignation may have passed, like the mildness of Barnabas, into the evil which is akin to it. Both may have learnt,

as most have to learn by sore experience, that affection, friendship, and fellowship in work, are divine blessings given for divine ends, and that they are never safe in our keeping. After the first bitterness, and the repentance for it, they may have had more true communion with each other than they could have had if they had been visibly united; at least they may have been in preparation for that communion. Each, no doubt, had his work to do; the presence of the other might have interfered with it. Barnabas in Cyprus vanishes out of the history. Traditions give scarcely any help in discerning his figure. If a spurious work, full of mystical conceits, which is attributed to him, in any degree represents the character of his mind, we may understand why he will have been a hinderer rather than a helper to the apostle of the Gentiles in the stern practical task to which he was appointed, as a builder up of churches in that day, as a teacher of the Church in all days to come.

What these tasks were the remainder of this book is to tell us. A tradition, which modern criticism has not generally rejected, identifies Silas with Luke. They seem to be mixed in the narrative; very soon, at all events, the historian assumes the character of an eye-witness of the events which he relates. He does not care to tell us anything of himself, nor would he tell us so much of St. Paul, if he had supposed himself to be a narrator of the acts of apostles, not a narrator of His acts who sent forth apostles to proclaim His kingdom to the world. St. Paul is important as the herald of that kingdom to Greeks and Jews, to Roman proconsuls, to tributary kings, finally to

the city of the Cæsars. Therefore a certain series of his acts have been preserved for our benefit; therefore we may discover, if we study these, that each brings before us some aspect of the early Church, which without it we could not have known; some hint respecting conditions of the later Church which is needful for our encouragement and our admonition.

The words which follow—"And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches"—exhibit one part of the work of the teacher, one great necessity of the disciples. He could not give them their position. He could only remind them what their position was. He could tell them what foundation had been laid for them. He could warn them of a number of temptations, which they had to suspect, that this was not firm enough for them, and to build upon another. Of such temptations he became more aware as his experience in the administration of the churches increased, as he compared it with the experience of what was passing in himself. Thus was he able to strengthen the churches which had already grown up, according to their different occasions and necessities. Thus was he able, in the midst of his labours, or when his labours were suspended by imprisonment, to write letters which, because they go so thoroughly into the wants of his own time, appear to anticipate all the wants that should spring up in countries of which he had only heard, or had not heard, the names.

The next incident, which we are told of at the beginning of the 16th chapter, has often been represented as an instance of apostolical compromise. He found a disciple whose name was Timothy; his mother was a Jewess who had accepted the Gospel, his father

was a Greek. St. Paul wished to take him with him on his mission. He circumcised him, because of the Jews who were in those quarters, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. To do an act because of the Jews in those quarters might certainly imply a deference to mere opinion. It might imply that St. Paul was giving up the very principle for which he had been contending at Antioch and at Jerusalem; and this, too, after that principle had been conceded by those who were most likely to have hesitated about it. But St. Paul's conduct might mean something altogether different from this. The sign of the covenant was, as I have said, a sacred witness that men did not come of themselves into the kingdom of God, that He called them into it. Anything which weakened this impression on the mind of the Jew was morally injurious to him. Anything which strengthened it in the mind of the Gentile was morally beneficial to him. Where the parents were both Jews, there was of course no question; very little if the father was a Jew. Where both were Gentiles, the point had been decided already. To enforce circumcision in that case was to set aside the new covenant for the sake of the old. The one remaining possibility was that which the story of Timothy presents. It was a difficult case for the exercise of Christian prudence. St. Paul decided it in the way which was most contrary to his own inclination and habits of mind. He could have no hope of conciliating his countrymen who hated him by any half measure. He might hope to remove some of their prejudices against the Gospel which he preached, by showing that he could give up everything except a principle, by show-

ing that he understood the real significance of the old covenant better than they did. Timothy was to preside over churches composed both of Jews and Gentiles. It was well that he should be able to claim the privilege of his birth for the benefit of both.

Having taken this step, he could with the more confidence deliver, in the different cities, the decrees of the elders and apostles in Jerusalem. It was strength to the churches to feel that they were not severed from their old Jewish life, because they had acquired a new and higher life. It was strength to feel that all the old history of God's calling and education was theirs. It was strength to feel that the Church was to be the expansion of the old Jewish commonwealth, rather than its destruction. It was strength to feel that in the Church had been revealed the very root of the Jewish commonwealth, that root upon which lawgivers and prophets had stood, which was hidden till the Son of God took flesh and died and rose again.

It seems to me, my friends, that the prudence of the apostle in not suffering the Jewish origin of the Church to be forgotten, whilst he most earnestly asserted the right of the Gentile to a place, and an equal place in it, was essentially a divine prudence, not the least a worldly prudence. I do not find that the Church has become more human or universal when it has disowned its birthplace and its ancestry. It has been less godly and less manly, more self-exalting, more effeminate, more superstitious. It has been disposed to put an earthly will in place of the divine Will; to regard the Son of God rather as an object of individual choice and affection than as a

King and Ruler; to substitute morbid religious feeling for the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, the source of good counsel, and right thoughts, and just work. A Jewish belief in the Lord God of Abraham may pass, as it did in the Pharisees, into a mere hatred of all who are not of the posterity of Abraham. It may pass, as it did in Mahomet, into a sincere healthy acknowledgment of an Unseen God, a horror of idols, but with a denial of that God as a Father. It may pass, as it did in St. Paul, into the confession of an Eternal Father, who, because He would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, sent His Son to redeem them from the service of all false gods, and to make them His children, and to put His Spirit into their hearts that they might say, "Abba, Father." This is the true and full development of the Jewish faith. When people scorn Judaism under pretence of being more spiritual, they do not confess God as the Ruler of the earth, as the King of men; they make exceptions for themselves; they refer events in their lives to His direction, thoughts in their minds to His inspiration; they assume to be His favourites rather than His ministers. The passages which follow in St. Luke's story illustrate the difference between this mode of thinking and St. Paul's. He goes forth as God's messenger to the nations. He feels that he cannot move a step of his own choice. He wishes to go from Mysia, it is said, unto Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered him not. There is no pretension in such language to any rare advantage. He acknowledges the Guide whom all men ought to acknowledge. He studies events that he may know His will. He gives up his own

plans, when he perceives that he is fighting against the plan which has been marked out for him. Here is the Christian who has learnt the full sense of the Jewish records. He sees God in all His ways. But the God whom he sees is the God who will bring Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians out of darkness into light, out of confusion and misery to order and peace.

Such a God, whether He speaks to him in the thoughts of the day, or in the visions of the night, can never lead him or any man into superstition, must be always raising him out of superstition. One night St. Paul beholds a man of Macedonia saying to him, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." He gathers that God means him to leave Asia for Europe. He obeys the voice. He comes to Philippi.

Christian writers have sometimes compared this invasion of our continent by the tentmaker of Tarsus with that which was undertaken four centuries before by the young Macedonian hero against Asia. It is not merely the startling contrast between the fame, the resources, and the object of the two men which makes the parallel valuable. Both were destined to leave the world after a few years; both in those years effectuated more than they aimed at. A new Greek civilization followed in the train of Alexander's conquest. Asia bowed to his country's wisdom more than to his arms. A civilization grounded on the name of the God of Abraham, grounded on the confession of a Son of God, was to follow the preaching of the poor Jew. It became the mightier of the two, by degrees it claimed the other for its servant. You have been born under the civilization which grew out of the conquest of St. Paul. You have been taught to regard that which

grew up out of the conquest of Alexander as dependent upon this. Do not abandon that belief. Do not think you can establish a bond between man and man upon the victories of physical or of intellectual power. Believe that a bond has been established between man and man in Him who offered Himself a sacrifice for men. Believe, as you feed upon His sacrifice, and as you ask that you may endeavour yourselves to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life, that all treasures of wisdom and art, all victories of intellectual and physical powers are His, that you may dedicate them and yourselves to Him, and that He will keep you from the strifes from which even apostles could not keep themselves.

XXIII.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(11th May, 1862.)

“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”—Acts xvi. 29, 30, 31.

“**L**OOSING from Troas, we came,” says St. Luke, “with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.” In such simple words is that entrance of Paul into Europe, of which I spoke last week, described by one who took part in his enterprise. He does not dwell upon any of the associations which Philippi calls up in our mind. He does not speak of it as bearing the name of the destroyer of Greek liberty, as celebrated within a century for the last struggle of Roman liberty. But he tells us that it had a Greek character, and that it was under Roman magistrates. Both these facts are needful to his story, both concern the work to which St. Paul was called.

There were Jews in Philippi, as there were in every other considerable city. But apparently they were not numerous or important enough to have a synagogue. "On the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." The word Sabbath shows that it was a regular gathering and a Jewish gathering. A few, chiefly women, still clung to the traditions of their fathers in a heathen city. Or perhaps they were proselytes, people who had been wearied of sensual idolatries, who were asking the God of Abraham, of whom they had heard, to give them the light which they longed for, to teach them something more of Himself, and of how they might worship Him. Surely He had created that river, and yet He could be no mere river-god, no mere power of earth, or sea, or air. The poor women who were gathered there felt that *they* needed Him, that in some way He must be able to speak to *them*.

One of them, at all events, found that the hope was not a delusive one. "A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." The things that were spoken by Paul were the things which she had been waiting to hear. Was it possible that the God whom she worshipped, the God of righteousness and truth, could be indifferent to the creatures whom He had made? Could He be indifferent to any, even the humblest of them? to the stranger by that river side, to the seller of purple in Thyatira? Must

there not be a way from Him to her? Was it possible that she could pray to Him if there were not? She was told of such a way. A Son of God had actually come from God to man, had made Himself one with men. A Spirit had come forth to teach men of His Father and of Him. Her heart is opened. She is sure that God and not man has opened it. It is with her heart that the Invisible Being holds converse; it is with her heart that she holds converse with Him. Often has this been said, often has it been noted; the discovery was made to her own very self; she did not accept the message as a general one to all who were worshipping there, but as a direct one to her. The lesson is true. It does lie in the words. But it may be utterly perverted. It may be made to contradict the words which follow. "She was baptized, and her household." It was a distinct, direct message to her. Therefore she claimed to be baptized, to take her place as one of a body. It was a message to her, the most insignificant of women, a mere seller of purple. Therefore she believed it was true for her household as well as for her, that it could not be true for her if it were not true for them, that the Son of God had not taken her nature if He had not taken theirs, that He had not died for her if he had not died for them, that God was not speaking to her if He was not speaking to them. The things which St. Paul told her implied this. God had opened her heart to take in this truth. Apart from Him she was a separate, individual creature. Believing that He had stooped to her, she rose to the dignity of a human being. If it had been

otherwise, she might have gone back to Thyatira boasting that she had received a divine communication, had received marks of a divine favour, with which those about her had nothing to do. As it was, she became the first member of a Greek, perhaps of a European, Church. She was to be one of a body of witnesses to all Israelites, Proselytes, Heathens, Greeks, Romans, Asiatics, of the redemption which had been wrought out for them.

The next incident in the story brings before us one of the most striking phenomena of that time. It has therefore been supposed—very wrongly, I think—to have little connection with our time. “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.” How widely diviners and soothsayers were diffused over the Roman Empire in this time of general scepticism and unbelief, I have already had occasion to observe. Simon in Samaria, Elymas in Cyprus, exhibit to us specimens of the same genus; men who were using the hints respecting the invisible world which they had derived from the Jewish Scriptures, or which had come to them in their own meditations, for the purpose of exercising power over their fellows, of turning their ignorance to profit. One we found swaying the mob of a city, one offering counsels to a proconsul. In both cases apostles stood forth to deliver the dupes, to do justice upon the impostors. In both cases their witness of a Spirit of truth was found the only adequate counteraction to a spirit of falsehood.

Here we have a different spectacle. A female, pos-

sessing no doubt a nervous, susceptible temperament, open to all sensible as well as all spiritual impressions, was doing the work of a set of successful traders. How, it will be asked, did she serve their purposes ? Did she merely pretend to be under a certain mysterious influence which acted upon her, which caused her to utter strange words and give vent to guesses which might be sometimes right and sometimes wrong ? Did the power which brought her masters so much gain proceed from this trickery ? I cannot think so. I believe that her will and reason were enslaved as she said they were, that the recognition of her power by those who were about her was the recognition of spiritual influences and a spiritual world which they felt to be about them, as well as about her. She could not help believing, they could not help believing in such influences, in such a world. What she did not believe in—what they did not believe in—was in a Spirit of truth who does not make men's wills and reasons slaves, but who sets them free. I hold, therefore, that there is no language so honest and so simple as that of St. Paul and St. Luke, none which expresses the facts of the case so faithfully. She was “possessed with a spirit of divination.”

But there was in her, as there is in all human beings, however bewildered by fantastic and false impressions, a yearning after truth, a confession of that which is true. “The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” The poor creature felt that in the words which she heard concerning a Spirit of Righteousness and Truth, the Spirit of a living and true God, there

was the salvation from that perpetual mingling of the earthly and the heavenly, of the false and the true, of light and darkness, which had become at once her necessity and her torment. It was too much to hope that she could ever shake off her fetters ; but she might tell those whom she had deluded that there was a better wisdom, a clearer divination than hers.

How the apostles might have profited by such a testimony as this ! Paul had resisted the temptation to receive the homage of the people of Lycaonia ; he had cried out to them, "Sirs, why do ye these things?" when they came forth with their oxen and their garlands. But here was a much subtler temptation. Why not avail himself of this woman's influence over the people of Philippi, to get a hearing for his Gospel from many more than those who worshipped by the river side ? Was she not speaking that which was right ? If she had a false spirit in her, was it not a great triumph that that false spirit should be compelled to bear witness to the truth ? Cunning arguments, which have had weight in every age with the ministers of Christ ! St. Paul could only hear in them the voice which had said to his Master, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." He could only answer as that Master had answered, "Get thee behind me, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." It is not a help to truth to have the countenance and patronage of falsehood. It is not a wise device to persuade men by pious frauds and impostures to become the liegemen of the Lord our Righteousness. But St. Paul did avail himself of the testimony of the woman, though not in this

way. He was grieved at her praises, so far as they would bring him in any reputation. He showed that he was a servant of the most high God, who could give her the salvation she wanted, for he said to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."

In later days that has been called an exorcism. And priests have traded in exorcisms, just as this woman's masters traded in her divinations. No language can be used so holy and so pure that it may not become the language of lying when a liar utters it. Those who seek the glory that cometh of men, and not the glory that cometh of God only, will have their reward. In one time as much as in another, by Christian formulas as much as by heathen formulas, they will make their gain from the fears of men; they will use their divinity to make them their slaves. Those who have the other object, those who seek to deliver men from all powers that degrade them, those who are sure that that is God's purpose, will also have their reward. It may be first of all, as St. Paul's was, —a prison.

"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them

safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

We have here the first example that we have met with of a persecution that was not undertaken by Jews, not even instigated by Jews, but which was directed against Paul and Silas, professedly at least, in their character as Jews. No distinction is drawn between them and any other of their countrymen. The charge brought against them is, that having been allowed to dwell in a city where the gods were worshipped, they had been interfering with the customs of their protectors, and therefore must be treated as enemies of the peace. The charge undoubtedly does not proceed from the Roman authorities. There is no pretence of the government of the Cæsar being endangered by the worshippers by the river side. It is a private interest which is affected, but it is one of those interests which the Roman law will take care of. The traders in divination are not to be molested in their gains more than other traders. It is a branch of commerce in which there may be many rivals, but which is too popular, which has too manifest an influence over the minds of the multitude, not to deserve such countenance as the civil rulers can give it. And the popular feeling supported these political considerations. The multitude could as little bear to lose the enchantress as those who had directly benefited by her. The severest sentence is the most acceptable. The jailor is ready to execute it to the uttermost.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."

It is not always so with witnesses for truth. Their hearts may be crushed, as Jeremiah seems to have been, by the terrible atmosphere of the dungeon. But that men, who believed that the most high God is a Redeemer, should turn to Him and find a refuge in Him, and should be full of thanksgiving at the thought that He heard them, though their feet were fast in the stocks, was surely reasonable. The songs were given ; they did not start out of the natural hearts of Paul and Silas. They were given, it may be, as much for the sake of the other prisoners as for their own sake. The witness of a Deliverer which rose to heaven was not of a Deliverer for Paul and Silas, else why had they come to Philippi? Why were they there ? Did they then pray that they might be set free from that prison ? We are not told that they did ; we hear that they sang praises for that which God was and for what He had done ; their prayer may have been for something very different from an earthquake. But we are told that an earthquake came, " So that the foundations of the prison were shaken : and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."

Was that a miracle ? If I knew exactly what we all meant by a miracle I could give an answer. I think the earthquake was appointed by God, as every earthquake is appointed by God. I delight to believe, to know, that because it proceeds from God there are moral purposes in it, and in every earthquake, which do not interfere with the regular laws that govern nature, but which could not be if nature made her own laws and governed us. If the Old or New Testament reveals to us in particular instances these moral

purposes, it gives us a guide of which we can make use in other instances ; we are left less to our own superstitious guesses. Earthquakes naturally convey to men a sense of terror and judgment. When the earth quaked at Sinai it was to confirm the words—“I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.” When it quaked at Philippi it was to testify of that Redeemer to whom Paul and Silas were singing praises. The sounds and convulsions are not, if we accept the testimony of the Bible, messages concerning a god who seeks to crush us, but warnings against distrust in a God who seeks to save us. That is surely the lesson to be drawn from the rest of the narrative.

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyselv no harm : for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

The picture is as consistent as it is vivid ; for it exhibits those inconsistencies which a man like the jailor would be sure to exhibit. He is bewildered by the earthquake. His first terror is of his masters. He shall be called to account for his neglect of his office. He would kill himself to escape that peril. Then invisible terrors take place of the visible. Some God is surely avenging Himself. These two

prisoners are calm. They seem to know what their God is doing. Perhaps He is there, punishing the wrong done to them. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Saved from what? How can he tell? From this terrible fear of past, present, future, of the magistrates, of the earthquake, of the gods above and beneath; from the accusing spirit that is saying to him—'Thou art a guilty man.' There is no need to question him about his meaning. What he wants is a deliverer from his enemies, whatsoever and wheresoever they are, seen or unseen. Paul and Silas answer him according to the deepest sense of his words. They do not tell him that they know a way in which he can be saved, though other men perish. They say—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." 'We announce to thee a Lord and Friend of thy household, and of all households. We tell thee of One who can save thee from all thy enemies by saving thee from thyself. Believe that you have such a Lord and Friend nigh to you and not afar off. Trust in Him, and no magistrates or earthquakes, or death here, or death hereafter need affright you, for He has conquered all these.'

What could a man, awakened out of sleep by an earthquake, a man hard by profession and by custom, learn of such a faith in the course of a night? Nothing; if that faith were in a set of opinions, if it were not in a living Person. Nothing; if that Person were not really what we say He is, our Lord—the Lord of men. But if He is that, if He is the Word of God, from whom all light comes into the consciences of men, who is with us when we know Him least, when we fight with Him most, Paul and

Silas might speak to the jailor "the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." And he might in "the same hour of the night" show that he repented of his inhumanity, that he had become a man, by washing the stripes of his prisoners. And he might confess his subjection to the Lord, from whom that repentance had come, who had given him a sight of his true state, by being baptized, "he and all his, straightway." Why not? Why must a human child, who has been living away from his father's house, eating the food of swine, refuse to own his father when his father has owned him? Why should a man who has been living in ignorance of his Heavenly Father, doing all the brutal acts which He hates, refuse to own that Father when that Father has owned him? When the apostles bade him believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they bade him believe that the Father in heaven had owned him and his household. His baptism and theirs was a confession that it was so, a confession that he was not sold to do all evil acts; that he might be the free servant of One who loved men and wished them to love each other.

Self-assertion, it has been said often, and said with great emphasis in our times, belongs to the classical type of charity, to the old Greek and Roman. They were manly, though they might be proud. Self-denial is the virtue inculcated on the Christian. He is crouching and effeminate, though he may be humble. I think, my friends, that there is undoubtedly a kind of self-denial which is incompatible with manliness, as there is a kind of self-assertion which is incompatible with humility. But when the apostles said to the jailor of Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and

thou shalt be saved," they told him how he might deny a self which was the cause of all fear, cowardice, cruelty, that he might assert his true manhood. The best self-assertion of the old Greek and Roman came forth when he gave himself for his country. The self-denial of the Eternal Son of God reached its highest point when He asserted for mankind a right to worship God without fear, a right to defy all the powers of darkness and death. Whatever we have been hearing to-day of Lydia the seller of purple in Thyatira, or of the poor victim of a spirit of delusion, or of the jailor who said, "What shall I do to be saved?" we have been hearing of a message which enables men and women to shake off oppressors, to vindicate their proper stature as spiritual creatures made in God's image. The conclusion of the chapter shows that self-assertion in the strictest, most recognised sense of asserting the rights of a citizen, belonged to St. Paul's idea of the duty of a Christian man. "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondeinned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." The preacher of a Gospel to all nations was the truest witness for the sacredness of the law which bound together each nation. Whatever had restrained men's selfishness, whatever had been a witness for order and justice, had a divine principle in it. As for the sake of men, and for the honour of his God, he

could give up whatever was merely human, for the sake of men and for the honour of God he would not give up this principle. May God make us more self-denying Christians after St. Paul's pattern; then we shall be more stout in our assertion of those human rights which are needful to the performance of human duties, of that freedom without which we cannot be Christ's true servants.

XXIV.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(25th May, 1862—Morning.)

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.”—Acts xvii. 1.

YOU would, perhaps, have expected St. Paul rather to avoid cities wherein there were synagogues than to choose them. In those he was sure to meet with opposition. Whatever he said to the Gentiles would be contradicted by his countrymen. If he had gone into places where Jews were not previously known, he might have escaped some persecution; he might have persuaded himself that he should preach his Gospel with far greater freedom and advantage.

But he could not choose for himself. He was an apostle sent forth to do another’s work. If God *were not* calling the nations to confess their King, the call of a poor tent-maker would have been a miserably feeble and contemptible thing. If God *were* calling the nations to confess their King, and if He had called out one nation to be a witness of that King to the rest, those who belonged to it ought first to hear the summons. The apostles hitherto had been taught

to follow this rule. St. Paul could not deviate from it to escape any danger or to fulfil any conception of his own.

When St. Paul went into the synagogue of Thessalonica, he was quite aware of the hostility which he should encounter there. Every institution of his fathers which he praised most would be made a ground of accusation against him. He was setting aside the Covenant of Circumcision ; he was the disciple of One who had broken the Sabbath day ; he was imitating the heathen in speaking of a man as one with God. Above all, their respect for the divine oracles would be turned against him. The Scriptures were received and idolized by the Jewish people as records of divine communications which had been made to their fathers, as reasons for not believing in a God who was speaking to them. The apostles again and again allude to the veil which was over the eyes of their countrymen in the reading of the Old Testament, to the killing effect of the mere sounds and letters when they had ceased to be felt as living words. But the word of God was living and powerful, whatever those who heard it might make of it ; therefore,

“ Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

No clearer account of the apostle’s “manner” here or elsewhere could have been given us. The book which is dear to the members of the synagogue —generally from old tradition and habit—to some

because it had revealed to them the thoughts of their own hearts, and had told them of a God who was not afar off—is dearer to him than to any of them. He believes that its worth to him and to them is the same. It is not a collection of sentences, divine or human. It is not a system of religion. It is the testimony concerning a King, whom law-givers, prophets, sovereigns, in one generation and another, had acknowledged as their King; who they believed would one day be shown to be anointed by God as their King, and King of the universe. He reasons with them out of the Scriptures about this King. He shows them that if He was what their fathers took Him to be, He must suffer. A King who did not suffer with His people, who did not enter into *all* their sufferings, would not answer to the visions of holy men. He would not have the characteristics of the Anointed of God. He would not exercise a real dominion. He would not be the image of the perfectly good Being. He would not be a Redeemer of those who had wandered from goodness out of their bondage to evil. And the Sufferer must be a Conqueror. He must yield to death that He might overcome death. He must rise again from the dead. So much he could gather out of the Scriptures, not by forcing them from their sense, but by showing that every messenger of God, every Israelitish king, was a sufferer with those to whom he came, because he was a messenger from God, and because he was royal; —that every one had been sent to fight with some enemy of man, and in the midst of failure had at last proved victorious. He could show that none had suffered fully with men, that none had succeeded

in vanquishing the enemy whom he had defied. He could show that all were taught to crave for One who should be the complete fellow-sufferer with those who had to bear sickness, desertion, death, the complete destroyer of all that had fought against the purposes of the Creator, against the blessedness of the creature.

“And this Jesus whom I preach to you is Christ.” ‘Your fathers have not been deceived. They have not set before themselves an imaginary Ruler, endued with imaginary perfections and imaginary powers. However strange and apparently irreconcilable those demands, I declare to you that they have been satisfied. The dream was of God’s sending; He has sent also the interpretation of the dream. Behold the Man in whom kingly power and suffering meet, in whom power has been manifested through suffering !’

No doubt when St. Paul began to reason, and to reason out of the Scriptures, the rabbis of the synagogue at Thessalonica will have been well pleased to hear him, and to enter upon the discussion. What a number of texts they knew in the Law and the Prophets ! What a number of comments they know about the outer sense and the inner sense of those texts ! Did he wish to speak particularly respecting the Messiah ? They were quite ready to meet him on that topic, since it was the one that interested him most. They could say where the Messiah should be born, and when He might perhaps be expected, and what He would do to restore the kingdom of David, and to make the heathen serve Him. Passages innumerable might be quoted; something also of what

the elders had said about the most remarkable of them. This was legitimate reasoning ; consecrated by the practice of the most learned men, useful for the instruction of the unlearned.

But St. Paul dismisses questions about dates and localities, about common or cabalistic senses of words. He has not leisure for these debates. The question whether there is any one whom Jews or Gentiles are created to obey, and who He is, appears to him altogether more important. And some of his audience are of the same mind.

“ And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas ; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.” Here, as at Antioch in Pisidia, a discussion which was directed to Jews found its way to the hearts of Gentiles. Had it been a discourse on the technicalities of Scripture lore, that could not have been so. The announcement of a King of men, a divine and human Shepherd, took hold of those who had experienced human ills, those who needed a common and an Almighty Friend. Whence the news came signified nothing. What his credentials were, who brought it—these signified nothing. When the Deliverer first appeared signified nothing. The worshipper of Apollo wanted a Light of the World, a Teacher of Wisdom, —one who could come upon earth and mingle with men—no less than he who had been born into the chosen family, and had been warned from his youth against confounding the unseen God with things in heaven or earth or under the earth. Those who had learnt in the Jewish or Greek school were equally sufferers, equally heirs of death. One might under-

stand as well as the other that the Lord of men must prove His Lordship by suffering, and by rising again from the dead.

“ But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also ; Whom Jason hath received : and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.”

This was what former experience must have led the preachers of the Gospel to expect when they went into the synagogue. ‘ What ! you call upon us to believe that a man whom the Romans were able to kill ignominiously is our King, the King who was to set us free ! And you call upon us to believe your story that this man rose out of the grave, though he never appeared to punish those who had slain him, though you say only a few of his disciples saw him, and that he vanished soon from the earth ! And people are actually bowing to this King—renegade Jews mixing with the uncircumcised in the acknowledgment of him ! At least you shall not insult us with your heresy in this city. You appeal to Gentiles, you shall see whether we cannot appeal to them as well as you.’

For men possessed of a fanatical hatred to organize a mob out of the men in the market place, “ the lewd fellows of the baser sort,” how easy was this in a Greek city of the first century ! how easy in any city

in any century! The mob must be furnished with watchwords; what the watchwords are is a matter of almost utter indifference. Nearly always there is a kind of judicial absurdity and contradiction in them. The mob at Thessalonica goes forth to vindicate the decrees of Cæsar by breaking open the house of a man under the protection of the Cæsar; Jews tell them to charge the apostles with the very offence which was rightly imputed to their nation, that of continually rebelling against the Cæsar. But there is also very often a profound truth lying beneath the cries of a rabble, even when those cries are taught it by persons far more malicious than it is. The cry of turning the world upside down sounds at first like mere frenzy, when it was directed against persons so feeble as these poor preachers. The instinct which chose it was a sagacious and prophetical instinct. The Jews felt that their whole scheme of the universe was subverted by this new doctrine. They hoped to recommend themselves to God in various ways, but especially by eschewing men who were worshipping false gods and doing evil acts. According to St. Paul, God had sent His own Son from heaven to seek and save those who were worshipping false gods and doing evil acts. According to him, the business of men was to act as servants of God in testifying of His Fatherly will to sinful men, and of His having claimed them as His children and Church, of His power to reconcile them to Him by His Spirit. What a subversion of the Jewish world as it had become in that age! But was it less a subversion of the Gentile world? The Emperor was the head of that world,—the king of its kings, the patron of its gods. A man ruled it, whom

his subjects or he himself had exalted to godhood. And these apostles spoke of the image of the Eternal God having stooped to men and taken upon Him the form of a servant. Yes! the world was in very deed turned upside down, there at Thessalonica and wherever his Gospel was preached. And there could be no better summary of that Gospel than the one which the Jew and Gentile mob devised. There is another King—altogether unlike the Cæsar, the very reverse of the Cæsar—one Jesus. These Thessalonians did in fact anticipate, in their rough, wild way, the testimony of after history—that which led to the persecution of the Church in the second and third centuries, that which was sadly forgotten but never ceased to be true in its subsequent triumphs. The alternative is between a universal tyrant or this universal Deliverer; between some kind of Cæsar who insists that all should give themselves to him, and that Jesus who gave Himself for all.

At present “the people and the rulers of the city” were sorely “troubled” when they “heard these things.” They see that men have come among them who, whether rebellious or not themselves, are likely to be the causes of rebellion; who have exasperated a part of the population which is easily exasperated, and have given excuse to the mischievous disposition of another part which is always ripe for mischief. The business of the rulers is to keep the peace; opinions they care nothing for. They took “security of Jason, and of the other,” and “let them go.” The apostles would have disobeyed an express command if they had stayed in a city which was determined to cast them out. “The brethren immediately sent away Paul and

Silas by night unto Berea." Their work in Thessalonica was done. A church had grown up there at their preaching. It must now fight its own way under better guidance than Paul's, though not without having counsels from him to cheer it and instruct it, to cheer and instruct men in countries far off from them, in ages to come.

There is a synagogue at Berea. We easily divide men into groups and classes. Gentiles form one group, Jews another. We can distinguish Gentile sects and Jewish sects; Jews of Palestine perhaps from Jews of Egypt. But here, in the very same region, in cities both Macedonian, both under Roman government, are two sets of Jews, not marked out from each other by their sect affinities, but clearly marked by the difference of their characters. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Does it not strike you, when you first hear this language, as if two qualities were asserted for these Bereans which could hardly co-exist? "They received the word with all readiness of mind." Does not that seem as if they at once and without effort accepted the apostolical teaching? "They searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Does not that proceeding imply doubt, suspension of judgment, determination only to receive statements of which the evidence should prove completely satisfactory?

My friends, I think St. Luke had observed both these dispositions in the Jews of Berea; that you may observe both of them in the same people now. He

seems to have traced them to a common origin; I think you may do the like. That readiness of mind of which he speaks is not the haste to welcome a new opinion, because it comes supported by ingenious arguments, or by some high authority, or by popular favour; because it promises some great advantage near or distant; because it awakens some terrible alarms. Such haste is indeed incompatible with any serious effort to ascertain whether the things that are repeated are so. But there is a readiness of mind which dwells in those who are impatient of darkness, who long for illumination. They listen, eagerly, intently listen, to those who bring them tidings of the things which they want to know. The appearance or reputation of the speaker troubles them little, what he has to say concerns them infinitely. They cannot be content with a superficial understanding of it. However pleasant it may sound, it is nothing to them if it is not true. They must know whether it is true. They suspect it the more because it would give them such contentment and joy if they might embrace it with their whole hearts. They are free from captious doubt. But they demand a thousand times as much of overwhelming evidence as a merely frivolous sceptic demands. For with them it is no play work; their being is at stake; they must know that they may live. These are the men who, because "they received the word with all readiness of mind, searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

And, "therefore," says the historian, simply but significantly, "many of them believed." Theirs *was* belief in the manly, full sense of the word. It was a

belief which really mastered those open, conscientious minds. They bowed, not to the reasoning of an apostle, but to a revelation of God. The entrance of the word brought the light which they had longed for. An unseen Lord had discovered Himself to them. And that discovery was not for Jews more than for Greeks; not for men more than women. He who had created all and redeemed all had made them know something of the exceeding greatness of His power—something of the riches of His grace.

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.”

And good work these Jews of Thessalonica were appointed to do; useful ministers they were of a cause which they meant to obstruct. The Bereans would pursue their studies whether those things were so. Persecution would give them zest; would show them that their faith did not stand upon their readiness of mind, but on Him whom they had owned as the root of all that was true in their minds or in any minds. And meantime Paul had another task in hand, the most unlike, at least in its outward appearances, to that in which he had been engaged at Thessalonica and Berea. There he had to reason in the synagogues out of the Scriptures. But those who conducted him in his flight from Berea brought him to Athens. How he would reason there; whether the Hebrew of the Hebrews would have any word to speak in the city of Minerva he might scarcely know. It would be given him in the right hour what he should say.

That subject I reserve for another Sunday. Let us

not leave the one of which I have spoken to-day without drawing some lessons from it for our own use. First, we have inherited the Scriptures which the Jews read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. We have inherited along with them those Gospels, Epistles, Acts of the Apostles which were written by men whom the Jews cast out of their synagogues. We have inherited with these treasures all the temptations to abuse them which beset any Jew. A veil may be on our hearts in the reading of the New Testament as well as of the Old. That veil may shut out Christ, the living Lord, from us. We may be wrapt in the letter as the Jews were ; and the letter may kill us as it killed them. The danger is greatest when we are most satisfied with ourselves ; when we are boasting of our possession of the Scriptures, and of our acquaintance with them. Then more than ever are we likely to turn the conclusions which we draw from the Scriptures into occasions of strife and separation from each other ; then more than ever are we likely to put ourselves and our own notions in place of Him in whom we say that we believe.

But whatever we may make of the Scriptures, they do set forth a living and Eternal King. His shout is in the midst of them. And when our pride is taken down ; when we discover how little we know of that which we fancied we knew thoroughly ; when we are driven to ask for a help which no mere texts can give, and which no commentaries can help them to give, then once again may He speak to us out of the Book, and make us understand that He is the centre of that unity to us which all our schemes and theories about the Bible have been seeking to dissolve.

Therefore, secondly, our business is to show men and women, poor and honourable, who think the Scriptures contain the words of Eternal Life, that they testify of Christ the Son of God, and the Head of all men. We are not to doubt that if we say so, meaning what we say, we shall stir up the strife and bitterness of all sects now, just as they were stirred up while Christ was on earth, and when His apostles went forth in His name. But neither are we to doubt that there will be those who, with all readiness of mind, will receive the tidings of their King and Deliverer, who will wonder how it is that they have taken His name so often into their lips, and have so little understood what might there be in His name. Such persons will search the Scriptures with quite another purpose than to discover which of a set of opinions that have been presented to them is the most probable. They will search the Scriptures to see whether they actually speak of a Reconciler and Peacemaker between God and men, and man and men, or whether the thing is not so, and we have merely practised an imposture in saying that it is. My conviction is, that when we thus search the Scriptures we shall find what we are in search of; that they will give out their secret; that we shall claim it as revealed for us and our children. They will say to us—The tyrants of the earth may be exalted very high; they may do exceedingly proudly. But there is another King, one Jesus, who was crucified, died, and buried to rise again. Before Him all shall stoop at last.

XXV.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

(1st June, 1862.)

“ And some said, What will this babbler say ? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods : because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”—Acts xvii. 18.

“ **W**HILE Paul waited . . . at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

Did that city then excite no wonder or interest in him by all its beauties of nature or art ? Were these so essentially heathenish in his Jewish eyes that he could only look upon them all as hateful and accursed ? That he did not come to Athens or elsewhere to look for beauties or find pleasure is true. I am not sure whether any one learns of a great nation’s memorials much of its past condition who does that. If the visitor of Athens now, as in former days, has not more of sorrow in his mind than of mere enjoyment, I can hardly think that he has taken in its deep lessons ; that he really feels what it was meant to be, and what it might become.

St. Paul's oppression in the sight of the Athenian temples and altars helped, not hindered him, to see into the very inmost sense of its worship; to understand it as no scholar has ever understood it; to see such a hope rising out of the very depths of the national abasement as no Hellenic patriot has ever seen. He found a synagogue, we are told, in the midst of the temples. He disputed with the Jews and devout men or proselytes in it. What the disputes were about we do not hear. Certainly, if we may judge by his own conduct, he was not persuading his countrymen to think less seriously and awfully of their own stewardship as witnesses of the one God, or to suppose that that stewardship must sever them from the worshippers of Pallas and Apollo.

And the Jew did not only dispute with Jews. He disputed "in the market daily with them that met with him." A genuine Athenian practice then as in former days. Indeed one cannot read St. Luke's brief story without being reminded of those former days. Socrates, in the market-place, used to dispute with men of the different schools. Each had its own scheme of the universe. Each had its own notion of the supreme good. The shrewd and honest disputant led his disciples to feel that these schemes of the universe and theories of the supreme good would help them little in the battles of life. They had not given account of the words they were playing with. They had not felt the ground at their feet, while they were speculating about all things in heaven and earth. They must dare to look through speculation for that which is. They must confess a secret guide of their hearts and minds. He would lead them to the right

and away from the wrong. For these teachings he was called a perverter of youth and a bringer in of strange gods.

St. Paul encountered the teachers of the schools which had risen out of those in the days of Socrates. These too had their scheme of the universe ; their theory of the highest good. And St. Paul, like Socrates, led them away from speculation about all things in heaven and earth to seek for the ground of their life ; for a Substance that lay beneath them. He told them of a Lord of their spirits—One who would guide them out of wrong to right. It had pleased God, he said, to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach Him among the Gentiles. God had shown him who that Guide and Teacher was, to whom Socrates, in his conscious ignorance and weakness, had turned ; whom he had asked to keep him from the snares of sense, and to show him the thing that is. St. Paul could speak out the name of this Divine Teacher. “He preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.” He could tell them that the Lord of his spirit had come forth out of the secret place ; that He had proved Himself the Lord of nations, the Conqueror of death.

The charge therefore against St. Paul was almost in words the same as the charge against Socrates. “He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods.” That charge had led Athenian judges to decree the poison cup for their noblest citizen. Why was not the like punishment reserved for this stranger ? His doctrine was more definite. Very soon it would be recognized as more dangerous to the state by the Roman Cæsar. The beasts of the Amphitheatre would do more work than the hemlock had ever done.

But the Athens of this day was not the Athens of the days of Socrates. Then there was a belief, real, however confused, in the traditions of their fathers. The gods were believed to be protectors of the freedom of the city. Another condition of mind had succeeded to this; much more tolerant, because utterly heartless. No one has described it and the consequences of it so vividly as St. Luke.

“And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)” To this state had those come whose ancestors fought at Salamis. With all faculties now, as when they were freemen, for thought and action; able to take in any theory, to practise any sleight of hand, but craving only for news; eager to be amused with reflections about things visible or invisible; because nothing was true, everything was possible, practising the ancient ceremonies—Why not? What harm was in them? Might not some good come out of them?—with all the vague fears of evil powers which no human being can banish, till the awe of that which is holy and divine has taken their place and driven them out. Was this any message for such men as these? “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.” No, he did not say that. He said that all things he saw proved to him that they had a great reverence or fear of gods or demons. Not only

the temples, which struck him as he first entered the city, showed him this; he was more convinced of it the more he examined their ceremonies.

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” He had asked, no doubt, what that meant; what the history of the altar was. He will have been told that on the occasion of a certain pestilence they had invoked the gods whose names they knew. There might be some one whom they did not know. It was safer not to omit him. Such a proceeding undoubtedly bears witness to a fear of gods. The air might be full of them. Each one might have some power which another did not possess. Who could tell? And these gods are strictly described as demons; gods with human feelings and tempers; not removed out of the reach of mortal sympathy or apprehension; capable of being represented in beautiful mortal forms.

But that unknown God! Might not he be more than this? Might he not stand altogether aloof from human sympathy or apprehension? Might it not be impossible to represent him in any human shape? Near that very Areopagus were the shrines of furies, sometimes called by a good name to propitiate them, but whom it was safer not to name, not to speak of. The mysteries which every Athenian believed to be sacred spoke of a Being somewhere who could not be set forth in any image. There was a dark Fate beyond the gods themselves which at last determined their acts. This, the unknown Power, was always haunting the imagination of the Athenian. Would death make him known? Must not the demons, benevolent or malignant, be implored to as far as

might be, protect them from the Destroyer ? “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” Again, our translators, without directly contradicting the sense, have given a harsh and arrogant form to the apostle’s language, which has all the effect of falsifying it. The word “ignorantly” sounds like a word of reproach or contempt. It is no such thing. St. Paul simply adopts the language of the inscription, ‘Whom not knowing ye worship, ye regard with piety’—the sense is highly respectful, not at all depreciatory—‘Him am I declaring to you. You charge me with setting forth new gods. You mistake me. I am leading you back to the first of all, to your Creator and mine.’

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.”

Here is the unknown Being indeed coming forth from His terrible concealment. ‘You cannot identify Him with the world, for He made the world ; or with anything in the world, for He made all things therein. You cannot confine Him in your temples. He does not want the services of your hands. For He is the Giver of all you have, and of all you enjoy—of the life that is in all things, and of the life that is in you.’ A strange overthrow of the notions in which Greek worship and sacrifices appeared to rest, yet what a vindication of the faith which was latent in that worship and those sacrifices !

But this declaration of a Creator of things visible or invisible is a very small part of the apostle’s

announcement. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." 'This unknown God whom you have worshipped is the Lord of men ; of men everywhere, and in all periods. He has called nations into existence ; He has ordered the places in which they dwell. The ages have been appointed by Him. And for what end ? What is the government of men and kingdoms for ?' We are wont to speak of the vain and idle dreams of the nations which tried to find God. We are wont to frame an argument for the truth of the Scripture records out of their failure. St. Paul proceeds in a different method. He regards all the efforts of the nations to feel after God as wonderful instances of the purpose for which He has formed men, as clear indications that He has been at work among them. And if they have failed—if they have fancied that God was at a distance from them, and that they could only by mighty efforts arrive at any apprehension of Him—that, the apostle says, was their error and falsehood.

"Though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live, and move, and have our being." My friends, I dare not comment upon these words ; I dare not alter them. I would only ask God that if they are true, we may be every one of us brought to believe they are true ; if they are false, I think the sooner we all perish the better. But at least remember that they were spoken in that city which was wholly given to idolatry ; that they were spoken to men who spent their time in nothing else but to tell or hear some new thing. Perhaps, however, these people

were not intended to take the words as applying to themselves. Hear then this next sentence.

“As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

Could an apostle have taken greater pains to assure the Athenians that whatever he said was said to them? ‘I do not speak out of my sacred books. I claim the authority of your poet Aratus for my doctrine. And that doctrine is nothing less than that we—you and I—are the offspring of God.’

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” Here is the grand distinction, the principle upon which all the discourse turns. Man is not to think the Godhead like to these things which he can shape and mould, and on which he can stamp an image, because he is the offspring of God, made in the image of God. He is not one of the things which God has made. He is to claim the right of a child. Only if he does claim that right will he renounce his idolatry.

But can he claim it? Has God done aught to assert His fatherly right over men?

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”

This passage stands in direct relation to the subject of the whole discourse. ‘You have erected an altar to the unknown God. Well! that was a time of ignorance. You confess that it was. And God has overlooked and pardoned that ignorance. But now He has unveiled Himself. He has shown you what He is. Therefore He calls you not to continue this worship of an unknown God; not to continue this

worship of gods made by art and man's device. Therefore he asks you to turn to Him.'

How has He revealed Himself; in what character must we turn to Him?

"He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Here is the reason for repentance; the power to repent. The God who made the world, the God who ordered the bounds of man's habitation, has set forth a Man to be the King and Judge of men. He has declared that Man to be the Son of God with power by raising Him from the dead. So He has given this assurance to all men that they may arise and go to their Father. That, according to our Lord's teaching, according to the teaching of the whole New Testament, is repentance. God invites to no other than that. Christ is exalted to give no other than that.

Here then is the sum of the whole matter. The Athenians had tried to make God after their image, for God had taught them that they were related to Him; that there is—must be—a likeness between the divine and the human. Through this inversion of the truth they had fallen into mean thoughts of God, finally into very low and narrow thoughts of themselves. They had exalted themselves, and they were abased. God had sent forth His Son, His perfect image, to claim Athenians and all men as His offspring. That Son had abased Himself, had stooped to the condition of the poorest man. Him God had

exalted—in Him He had exalted men to the highest glory of which they were capable. They might call His Father their Father.

When we read this discourse on Mars' Hill, we naturally enough conclude that he who delivered it must have looked majestic, and that he will have spoken with overpowering eloquence. We can scarcely believe that the oration of Pericles over the graves of those who had fallen in the great war will have awakened the hearts of Athenians more than Paul's preaching of Jesus and the resurrection. There is nothing in the New Testament to justify such an opinion. St. Paul says that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible. St. Luke says at the conclusion of the address, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.” There was no startling impression, there was no rush of converts; chiefly indifference and contempt.

It is good that this should be so. The words, “In him we live, and move, and have our being,” and “we are also his offspring,” were not to establish themselves, there or elsewhere, then or afterwards, by human wisdom or human authority. They have proved their power in innumerable hearts; they have come to those hearts not as the words of a man, but of God. And yet they have never been accepted exactly and fully. Christendom is built upon them, but it does not acknowledge them; new and terrible battles may be needful before we shall cease to evade them and explain them away. So it is with the doctrines that we repeat oftenest, that come to us most confirmed by the testimonies of apostles and martyrs. These

are not able to persuade us of Jesus and the resurrection. But when the grave opens out for one and another whom we have known and with whom we have worshipped, when one falls by lingering sickness, and another dies at his post manfully working to the last, when the accustomed voice is silent, when the face of the kinsman and friend is missed from the circle, then do we know that no mortal is saying to us—that He is saying whom all shall one day confess to be the Lord—“I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

XXVI.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(St. Peter's Day, 1862.)

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.”—Acts xviii. 1.

WE have lost sight of St. Peter in the narrative of this book, nor shall we meet with his name again. But we have not lost sight of the subject which St. Peter's Day brings before us. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” “upon this rock I will build my church”; these are the texts of St. Paul's preaching; the story of his acts is written to illustrate them.

I have already compared the life and work of the two apostles, and have endeavoured to show you how the difference of their callings and of their endowments made the Gospel which was committed to each clearer and fuller. This difference came out nowhere so strikingly as at Athens, where we last met with St. Paul. There, more than ever before, he appeared as the apostle of the Gentiles. He threw himself into the very heart of Greek mythology and Greek philosophy. He claimed the

language of both, the wants expressed by both, as witnesses of a divine education of the Greeks in past days, of a divine call to them that they should turn to the God in whom they were living, and moving, and having their being. He had never before—in terms at least—ventured on so vast a proclamation. He had never so directly outraged the Jewish exclusiveness.

Had he therefore forgotten his countrymen? Shall we hear no more henceforth of God's covenant with them—of their high calling? He goes from Athens to Corinth. It is but a slight change, one might say, from one Greek city to another; the one perhaps more busy, less merely occupied with disputation, with more remnant of political activity; but alike in its obvious characteristics, as much given to idolatry, chiefly of a very sensual kind. But this change to the apostle is as great as can be conceived. The atmosphere which surrounds him is again that of the synagogue. At home and abroad he is among Jews.

He "found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

A sudden transition certainly from Mars' Hill, and the people who spent their time in nothing else but to tell or hear some new thing, to this quiet

life of regular, mechanical work, only broken by arguments with his countrymen drawn from their old Scriptures. His companions would strengthen and deepen all his national feelings. It has been erroneously inferred from a passage in the biography of the Cæsar that the decree of Claudius had something to do with the disciples of Jesus. They were not known or marked by the heathens in Rome—scarcely, it would seem, from a sentence in the last chapter of this book, by the Jews—till the time of Nero. But that the Jews, or some of them, talked of a Christ who was to come; that that name was really a watchword of sedition to some, and might bring the whole body into suspicion and lead to an edict for their temporary expulsion from the capital—this would be extremely probable, and such an explanation would harmonize with the report of Suetonius. If this was the cause of their banishment, St. Paul could at once begin to tell Aquila and Priscilla in whom he believed that the promises to their fathers had been fulfilled; whom he confessed as the King of the whole earth. But at all events he would be drawn more closely than ever to the members of his own race; he would feel that he was to share with them the suspicion of the heathen world and its masters, if he had to bear their own suspicion and hatred besides.

“And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” That pressure of which St. Luke speaks all may have felt in a measure; as if a word which must be spoken was holding the heart like a screw or a vice; as if there could be no freedom till it had made itself heard. This

constraint St. Paul seems at times to have experienced more than any man, especially when he was amongst his own people, contemplating their high office in the world and the downfall which they were preparing for themselves. We may talk easily and glibly of the narrowness of the Jew, wrapping ourselves in the conceit of our own intellectual or moral comprehensiveness. St. Paul groaned over that narrowness, groaned as much over that vague philosophical comprehensiveness of the Athenian, which brought no deliverance to any man from the most degrading idolatry and frivolity. He believed that the Jew had a standing point from which he might move the world—a secret which might set the nations free. In this faith he could endure any contempt which the world might pour upon the child of Abraham; he could return the contempt in blessings. To see the children of Abraham at once scorning the world about them and exhibiting all its worst and basest characteristics; considering it accursed for worshipping false gods, and crowding all the heathen conceptions of those false gods into the conception of Jehovah; willing to meet all heathens upon the basis of trade for the sake of profit, only refusing to own them as men, consorting with them as children of Mainmon, unable to see in them the offspring of God, unable therefore to assert that title for themselves; to see the chosen people abjuring their own human rights, that they might not concede them to creatures of their flesh and blood; to see this and to have a presentiment, almost a certainty, that this would go on till they were cast forth, a bye-word and a hissing to the kindreds of the earth—this was an anguish into which we enter very

little, though there may come a divine discipline which will make it terribly intelligible to us.

“ And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean : from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house ; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” Why all this caution and formality in leaving men who clearly dis-avowed him and his message ? Was not his office to preach to the Gentiles ? Why cling to the synagogue to the last moment ? Why thus go into a house which joined hard to the synagogue ? A strange and quite unaccountable course of proceeding, if St. Paul supposed that Judaism was a religion adopted by a certain tribe and held by certain schools ; if he was come to establish a new sect. In that case the sooner he shook off his fellowship with Jews in Corinth or elsewhere the better ; he should have gone as far as he could from the synagogue, to show that the religion he had adopted was different from that of those who frequented it. But if he was not using words in a double sense, when he said that God had called his nation and made a covenant with it, and that He was accomplishing, and could accomplish, the purpose of that calling and covenant ; if he was preaching a gospel of deliverance to his people and all people from the sects which were tormenting and destroying them, and from the evil spirit who was infusing his venom

into those sects—then he could not fulfil his duty to God and to his brethren so well, as by declaring to them that no contumely of theirs should divide him from them and from their worship ; that if they drove him from their company, it should be by denying the privileges of their nation ; that even then he would do his utmost to prove that it was an act of necessity, not of choice—an expulsion from the synagogue, because he would be an Israelite.

And he had his reward—the highest he could desire, higher than he could have dreamt of—for this resolution not to be a schismatic. The ruler of the synagogue confessed the crucified King ; the first baptized members of a church in a Greek city—of a church which was to exhibit more than any the special Greek qualities—were Jews. By their name and position they upheld the great truth that the Church in all lands is a called body, as Abraham was called to be the beginning of a family and of a nation, each of which stood only by God's election, by His presence in the midst of it.

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace : For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee : for I have much people in this city.” That choking, stifling sense of a word which must be spoken, and which none will hear—what can deliver a man from it ? Nothing, I believe, but a conviction more deep, more penetrating still, that the word is God's word ; that He, not His creature, is speaking it ; that it is for Him, not for His creature, to make men hear. If that conviction was a delusion in St. Paul's case, all else was a delusion. It was the

ground of his thoughts, of his confidence. He must have been silent altogether if that were not true. How, at any given time, in any moment of despondency, the assurance would be brought home to him that he was not doing his own work, and that he was to persevere in spite of all reluctance and consciousness of failure, he could not tell. It might be in the night or the day, sleeping or waking, in a process of thought, or by a sudden flash of illumination. Let it come how or when it might, he must refer it to the same source. The Lord must have inspired the faith that was perishing in him ; the hope that was gone. It was not an irregular, fantastic impression ; it was a return from impressions that had too mighty a hold upon his fantasy to calm reality, to purpose, to patient action. The God who is the same always was delivering him from the one and prompting the other.

“ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.” Though the Jews had, for some special cause, been banished from Rome ; though they were liable at times to various persecutions in all parts of the empire, yet their worship was tolerated ; they might appeal to the justice of Roman proconsuls against those who interfered with it. They might appeal with good hope of success against a man of their own nation, who set up a new sect contrary to their ordinary recognized customs. For the State could have no inclination to

favour the growth of sects. They were likely to be more fervent than the regular Israelites, therefore more turbulent. Order and law were desirable in Roman eyes under all circumstances—even in those whose profession they scorned. “This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law” was therefore a good plea, if somewhat ambiguous in its wording, and a magistrate of the ordinary type would have probably given heed to it.

But Gallio, the brother-in-law of Seneca, was not a magistrate of the ordinary type.

“When Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat.”

The word “law,” which the Jews, knowing the charm of it, had ingeniously put forward, did not impose upon the philosophical judge. ‘It is your law, I perceive, not my law, not Roman law, that you ask me to execute. Roman law takes cognizance of crimes, overt acts against the peace. Allege one of these, and I am bound to give all attention. But as to executing *your* law,—which, so far as I can make out, is not busy about acts at all, but about words and names,—I have no commission to do that. Settle such follies among yourselves, they do not concern me.’ It should be said, in support of Gallio’s consistency, that he does not suppose his province to extend, as our translation seems to intimate, to “wicked lewdness,” which is a habit of mind. Both of his words denote

an offence that had been committed, whatever had been the origin of it.

So far, I apprehend, he was defining with great accuracy and wisdom the limits of his own jurisdiction, and refusing to interfere with matters of which he knew nothing. The next step of the story shows how the indifference and scorn of the philosopher could overpower the equity of the magistrate. A Corinthian mob, delighted with the rebuff which the Jews had met with, "took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue" (the successor probably of Crispus), "and beat him before the judgment seat." Such an outrage against any subject of the empire it behoved the Roman love of order to check. But Gallio, it is said, "cared for none of those things." If it amused the populace to punish any insults which Sosthenes had offered to their superstition by showing their contempt for his, the impartial despiser of both would not deny them this entertainment.

This half sentence about Gallio has been the motto to many sermons. He has been taken to represent a whole class of men who are indifferent about their souls. St. Luke evidently had no such intention in using the words. They mean apparently no more in his mouth than that Gallio was indifferent about the beating of Sosthenes. Gallio would have been exceedingly slow to admit that he was indifferent about the soul. He would have said that it was the subject upon which he and his kinsman in their gardens at home conversed most; if those Jews only knew anything about that topic, how willingly would he have borne with their harangues! But the Jews who accused Paul of teaching men to worship contrary

to the law did not intimate that he had discoursed about the soul. If he had been permitted to open his mouth, we have no reason to suppose from anything which he spoke at other times that he would have discoursed then about it. He could, perhaps, have told Gallio, and the Jews also, that the God of heaven and earth so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that Jews and Greeks, judges and criminals, philosophers and peasants, might be redeemed from all evil—specially from their pride and contempt—that they might become one body and be endowed with one spirit. That doctrine, and not any about the soul, or its properties, or its immortality, made the Jews to persecute him. That doctrine, and not any about the soul, awakened the contempt of philosophers, the suspicions of the Roman judges and rulers. That doctrine, and not any about the soul, has called a Christianity into existence, and has been the source of all its strength. For Christ has not said ‘Upon this doctrine of the human soul—its greatness or depravity, its happiness or its ruin,’—but ‘Upon this rock, that I am Christ, the Son of the living God—upon my divine Sonship and divine humanity will I build my Church, and against this the gates of hell shall not prevail.’

XXVII.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(6th July, 1862.)

“And he came to Ephesus.”—Acts xviii. 19.

FOUR memorable places remain to be spoken of in connection with the life of St. Paul and the establishment of the Christian Church — Ephesus, Jerusalem, Cæsarea, Rome. Under these heads I shall dispose of what I have yet to say about the book which we call “The Acts of the Apostles.” The 18th and 19th chapters, setting forth Paul’s work in the great commercial city of Asia Minor, these will occupy us to-day. The 20th, which describes his parting with the elders of the Ephesian Church at Miletus, deserves a separate consideration. I hope to treat of it next Sunday. The 21st to the end of the 25th cannot well be separated. They all arise out of his visit to the capital of Palestine, and contain his appearance before the Sanhedrim and the proconsuls of the province. The three last chapters turn upon his appeal to Cæsar, and his entrance as a prisoner into the capital of the world.

I believe that this arrangement of the subject is not only convenient in itself and may enable us to avoid repetitions, but that it corresponds to the intention of St. Luke. He speaks of St. Paul coming to Ephesus, of his going into the synagogue, of his refusing to stay there, though he was urged to do so, because he "must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem." Some have supposed that he actually went to Jerusalem at that time; that he had vowed to make some offerings in the Temple; and that he had shorn his head in Cenchrea, in order to accomplish his vow in the strictest Jewish fashion of that time. St. Luke says that he went to Antioch, that he spent some time there, and that he went through "the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." But of the accomplishing his visit to Jerusalem for the feast of the year nothing is said. His stay at Antioch and his journey through Galatia are dismissed in two lines. We are brought very speedily to Ephesus. Evidently it is the writer's wish that we should consider the events which he speaks of there continuously. If we take that course we shall have, I believe, an illustration of his letter to the Ephesians which the most learned commentators could not supply—illustrative also of the relation between his teaching and that of St. John, who dwelt in that same city, and declared there his message that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all," to the little children and the young men and the old. I believe whatever helps us to understand that special epistle of St. Paul and that general epistle of St. John is of more worth in this age than it was in any former age,

and may be of more worth to the next age than it is to us.

The first allusion to Ephesus shows us that much of St. Paul's work there, as in Corinth, would be connected with the synagogue. But before we come to his second visit, we have an intimation of peculiar influences to which the synagogue there was subject. Apollos, who is described as "fervent in the spirit," possessed with a mighty conviction; as "eloquent," able to impart such conviction to others; as "mighty in the Scriptures," mastered by the divine words, and feeling them not as dead letters, had come to Ephesus from Alexandria. In that city was a school of Jews who were neither Pharisaical literalists nor Sadducees disbelieving in angel, spirit, and resurrection. They perceived that a living Teacher, a Word of God, was speaking by the prophets. There was more in this than lay on the surface. The Word Himself, they felt, must teach them to understand the inner meaning of what He had uttered. They did not doubt that the wise heathen must have been taught by Him. Trained in this school, Apollos had heard of the man who came with the leathern girdle about his loins, preaching repentance in the wilderness of Judæa to publicans and soldiers. His conscience had recognized John as no less a messenger of the divine Word than Isaiah or Jeremiah. So he applied the lessons of his school. But the application altered the character of the lessons. He had taught that the vulgar multitude could not understand the divine lessons. They were hidden in figures and allegories; the initiated man must draw them out. John had spoken no allegories.

He had spoken straight to ignorant, brutal men of a Kingdom of Heaven. He had told all, wise and foolish, that they had sins from which they wanted to be delivered. Apollos must have received this message first as any of those vulgar and brutal men received it. He must have felt that he needed it as they needed it. He must have been converted from the pride of his school as they were from their violence or lust. Otherwise he would not have been fervent in spirit; he could not have called men in the synagogue of Ephesus to repent.

But it is said that till Aquila and Priscilla instructed him in the way of God more perfectly, he knew only the baptism of John. That does not mean that he denied Jesus to be a prophet, the highest of prophets, nor the Messiah. The obstacle to his receiving a carpenter's son as a messenger from heaven, which must have been improbable to his school, had been broken down for him. But he had not yet apprehended the meaning of the words which John spoke respecting the Christ, "He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire." That lesson lay hid in those he had already received. His mind was humble and teachable. That tentmaker and his wife who had just entered into it themselves could impart it to him. He did not then remain in Ephesus, but went into Achaia. There "he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." He preached the doctrine which St. Paul was everywhere preaching. He retained no doubt, as every true man will retain, the marks of his original education, and of the teacher who had given it a new direction. The Corinthians

were able to use his name as the watchword of a party opposed to the Pauline party. But Wisdom, we may be sure, was justified of both her children, however men might slander her and pretend to exalt them. The Divine Word would use the Alexandrian as well as the man who had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. Each might meet some minds which the other could not meet.

The influence of this teaching of Apollos in its first shape remained at Ephesus. When St. Paul came thither he found "certain disciples. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized ? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them ; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

Here was the lesson which Aquila and Priscilla had taught Apollos, livingly imparted to the disciples of Apollos. It was signified to them, as it had been signified to those who were met on the day of Pentecost, that the Son of God had come into the world to rule over the intellect, feelings, character, over the whole being of men ; to reform them after the image of Him who created them ; to quicken them with a new and eternal life. The power to speak with tongues and prophesy

were His powers. That the unlearned should be able to exercise such powers was proof that they were common human powers, not powers which set one man above another; and that they were divine powers wrought in them by a divine Spirit, not any which belong to man as an independent creature. These twelve men were 'disciples' so soon as they believed that they were under the teaching and guidance of an unseen Lord. They became a church, so soon as they confessed an indwelling Spirit, proceeding from a Father and a Son, who bound them into one body.

Still St. Paul went into the synagogue. But it was to dispute and persuade "the things concerning the kingdom of God." In other words, it was to dispute and persuade Jews that the synagogue had given place and must give place to a church, claiming all nations as under God's divine government, as capable of receiving and obeying His Spirit.

"But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." We saw how reluctant he was at Corinth to suggest the thought of a separation between him and his Jewish brethren; how he clung to them in spite of themselves. Retaining his principle always, his mode of exemplifying it here was different. He must show the Ephesians, Jews and Greeks, that there was a Spirit who could make them of twain one new man. He must protest against the division which the denial of that Spirit involved.

All who frequented that city from all parts of Asia Minor must hear that the divine Kingdom was not an exclusive but an inclusive Kingdom, one which drew people of all tribes into itself. But in doing this, he became a witness for righteousness and repentance such as no preacher of John's baptism could be. There was one special evil, as we have often seen, which infected the whole Roman Empire, one which gave a religious sanction to all its other evils. A belief in the influence of some powers, wicked or charitable, which acted upon the human spirits, which affected human thoughts and acts, had survived all scepticism about the forms of religion and the existence of God, and was making the trade of the diviner and false prophet more profitable than it had been in any former age. No trade tended so much to undermine the consciences of men, to destroy whatever remained in them of moral distinctions, to make the dream of a heaven utterly vulgar, the work of earth utterly fantastic; to remove awe, to produce a flutter of anxiety and dread. The sincere, serious preacher of John's baptism must have looked with unmitigated disgust at these triflers with all that was to him most sacred and real. 'Men and women,' he will have said, 'you are sunk in folly and baseness. You want an almighty hand to raise you out of that abyss. And you talk about communications from the unseen world, as paltry and frivolous as those which pass in your own world; more paltry and frivolous, for they help to make you think that there is no power which hates your sin and which can make you good. There will be a message from heaven to you, but it will be a message of fire. It will burn up the chaff of these fantastical

notions, and all the lying acts which follow from them.'

The preacher of Christ, and of a divine Spirit given to men, could use other language. He could meet the diviners on their own ground. He could confront them with the truth of which theirs was the counterfeit. Ephesus was the very place where such a confutation was needed, since it was the very place in which all forms of the delusion were sure to congregate. A commercial city, where the majority are occupied in the acquisition of material wealth; where there are sudden gains and sudden losses; where a sense of the power of chance and the success of gambling mingles strangely with the boast of practical wisdom, and the habit of distrusting any evidence but that of the senses; a city to which men from all regions resort, and in which there is leisure and luxury to entertain all new and strange novelties,—such a city will always offer attraction to the spiritual huckster; there he will reckon upon a safe market for his wares. What we are told of St. Paul's special miracles in Ephesus has direct reference to this state of things. It pleased the God of truth to show that the powers of healing are sacred powers, which the ministers of imposture and trickery may claim, but which do not belong to them; which are signs and pledges of His redemption of men, of His living and perpetual presence with men; not instruments of irregular craft, not given to awaken idle terrors or childish hopes. The man of science, who hates the quackeries of enchanters with a righteous hatred, is often tempted to think that the miracles of the New Testament foster those quackeries. Those who prac-

tised such quackery in Ephesus knew better. They felt that the apostles were witnesses for permanent laws ; witnesses, at the same time, that men are not merely the subjects of laws, as sheep and oxen are ; that they possess the capacity for understanding and for knowing Him who established them, because He endues them with his true Spirit. Therefore they saw in St. Paul their bitterest and most dangerous enemy. Here, as at Philippi, St. Paul had encountered those who believed themselves, whom others believed, to be under the dominion of evil spirits. He did not doubt the assertion ; he could not doubt it. These people exhibited lust, malice, falsehood in their words, acts, looks. They were evidently in captivity to lust, malice, falsehood. Were not these evil spirits ? What else do you like to call them ? Are they sensible things ? Can you handle them, or see them, or taste them ? Are they *good* then ? Or do they not get the mastery over men ? Do you find men able to shake them off at their pleasure ? You may have some names that you like better than this old name, that sound to you finer and more respectable ; but the fact remains, whatever name you give it. And it is a fact which must be treated in some way or other. St. Paul treated it by telling men that they were the servants of Jesus Christ, the Deliverer, and by his bidding the spirits in His name to go. He believed that he was serving a real Lord ; not a name, but a Person, and a Person who had come to set men free from their greatest curses. But, as I said before, exorcism may become a form of enchantment, as great an instrument of falsehood as any other. The sons of Sceva, a Jew, had probably tried it before, and

thought they might try it again with better success by following Paul's example. They called over some poor madman the name of that Jesus whom Paul preached. It was to them a mere name. They might practise incantations with it as well as with any other. And a lesson was given to them, and given to those who, in all days to come, should affect to believe in that Name, and should use it for purposes of imposture. The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" And the man "leaped on them, and overcame them."

St. Luke adduces it as the greatest proof that the Word of God was growing and prevailing, that men brought their books of curious arts and burnt them publicly. No scepticism or ridicule could eradicate from them the faith that they were spiritual beings, connected with a spiritual world. No scepticism or ridicule would hinder them from turning that faith into mischief and falsehood. Only a Spirit of truth could deliver them from the service of lies.

And only such a Spirit could really shake the idolatry which was mixed up in various combinations with this belief in enchantments. Demetrius, who dealt in shrines for the temple of Artemis, made this discovery. The craft of him and his fellow-workmen was in such danger as it had never been. The Jewish colony had been in the midst of Ephesus protesting on behalf of Jehovah, exhibiting contempt for the images made with hands. But it was harmless. The gains of the makers of shrines had not been affected by it; perhaps had been increased by it. St. Paul had not slandered the temple of the goddess; had cast no scorn upon the image that fell down from Jupiter.

But he had preached a Son of God, who had sent His Spirit of truth to make men the children of His Father. There, the sound instincts of Demetrius told him, was the power before which his craft and all similar crafts must fall. He was not afraid of scoffers or sceptics. He could leave the Jews to their own exclusive system. The message of a Spirit who had come to bind men into one family must be met by the space of two hours with the shout, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

And such experiments as that of the sons of Sceva the Jew will be made again in Christendom. And such shouts as that of Demetrius and his craftsmen will be raised again both in Christendom and heathendom. The battle of the Spirit of truth with the principalities and powers in high places, which have enslaved the spirits of men, has yet to be fought. The great question is—With what weapons will it be fought? On which side shall we be engaged? If we study St. Paul's work at Ephesus,—if we read his letter to the Ephesians,—we may get as much help as words can give us in answering the question. But oh! let us ask them—each for himself—as we kneel at the altar! Then God Himself will meet us, and will give us the light which the wisest words of men here cannot give.

XXVIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(13th July, 1862.)

(Preached on behalf of the Convalescent Institution, Walton.)

“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—Acts xx. 35.

THIS chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is like all that preceded it. Those who want moral maxims, or theological discussions, separated from the common incidents of human life, must go elsewhere in search of them. The writer tells us that Paul sailed into Syria. He gives us the names of those who accompanied Paul, most of which we shall never hear of again. We find Paul coming to Troas. The disciples meet together to eat bread. He speaks to them till midnight. We hear of the lights in the upper chamber, of the young man who was heavy with sleep and fell from a window, of their comfort when St. Paul went down and embraced him, and said that the life was in him. But no report is given of that apostolical sermon. Might it not have been better for him to give us that sermon

—it must have contained much lore for all times—than to have related incidents and names which only concerned that time?

My friends! it did not specially concern that time to hear of Sopater of Berea or of Eutychus. They were in themselves insignificant, then as now. They may be of greater worth to this generation than to former generations, if they lead us to think of the apostles as actual men, not as shadows, and if they make us feel that the highest theology is most closely connected with the commonest practical life.

So when St. Luke does give us a discourse of St. Paul, it is not one which can be called a theological discourse or an ethical discussion, an exposition of doctrine or a scheme of practice. Oh! how easy would the reading of it be to us, the ministers of Christ, if we could classify it under any of those heads! How comfortably we might prelect upon it, and apply it to all persons except ourselves! But it is full of terrors, not for our neighbours or our lay brethren, but for ourselves; because it sets forth not a system, but a course of life; the life of a pastor, not specially of an apostle. For the lesson which St. Paul learnt so deeply was how to become a man among men, work with them, suffer with them. Therein lies the power of his words. His sermon is an expression of himself. But when we ask how and when he acquired this wonderful art; in what school he was trained to the practice of it—we are brought into the very heart of his theology, we find that if his preaching would have been nothing without his life, his life would have been an impossible one without the truths which he preached.

What a place Ephesus holds in the history of the Church, what St. Paul did there, what enemies he provoked, we heard last Sunday. It was a kind of centre to all his work in Asia. This was the city where he had learnt what a Church is, how universal it is, what its foundation is. He had now taken leave of the city. He expected never to see it again. When he reached Miletus he summoned the elders of the Ephesian Church to meet him there. “And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house.”

This is not a treatise on pastoral work or pastoral theology. It is the account of a life of three years. It had been, he says, a time of trial. His countrymen had lain in wait for him. Demetrius had roused an open tumult against him. And yet, as he told the Ephesians in his letter, his enemies were not of flesh and blood. His fight had been with the spirit of distrust, of covetousness, of pride, which was assaulting the Jews and Demetrius, and was assaulting him continually. He had to find armour against these. And when he had found it, he knew that it was forged for the use of all as well as of himself. He knew that all had the same foes, and therefore the same friends. Here, he seems to tell us, was the secret of those earnest exhortations in public and from house to house, of which the elders of the Ephesians could

bear witness. He verily believed that the whole Church to which he spoke publicly, and every man to whom he spoke privately, whether he were a Jew or an idolater, was engaged in the same warfare with him. They might be throwing down their arms and yielding to their assailants; they might be fighting feebly; they might be wrestling in a death agony; they might be winning a victory. But as long as they had the faces of men and did the acts of men, he was certain that they were liable to become the slaves of a tyrant; that they were meant to be the children of a father.

Therefore his language, though various and adapted to each man's special necessities, was uniform.

“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” There was a perfectly good and righteous Being not far from any one of them, to whom they might turn in the darkest hour, when the assaults of the enemy were fiercest; to whom they might turn in those hours of ease, and luxury, and comfort, when there seemed to be no assaults at all, just because the strong man was holding his goods in peace, just because they were sinking in a death sleep. In those hours of evident peril, in those hours of seeming security, they might arise and go to the Father; they might be sure that He was speaking strength to them in the storm, was arousing them in the calm. And that blessed repentance toward God, being inspired by Him, would bring with it faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in Him who had resisted unto blood and had won the victory; faith that He must be stronger than sin, and death, and hell,

when they look strongest and when they are strongest. The man who uttered this message truly could keep back nothing that was profitable to them; no warnings, no encouragements. He must be telling men in every occupation, in every class of society, rich and poor, wise and unwise, of enemies who were plotting to rob and murder them. He must always be speaking of a God of deliverance and of hope.

“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

He may, as I said last Sunday, have gone to Jerusalem to feasts in former years, but he had evidently reason to know that this visit would be different from all that had gone before it. The Jews in the Greek cities would report his Gentile propensities. A storm was preparing to burst. He must meet the wrath of fierce factions in a doomed city. He does not affect indifference. He was bound in spirit. He felt that anguish of anticipation which is worse than actual experience. But he was sustained by a hope, the only one I think that will sustain a man. He had been entrusted with a work. He hoped that he might do that work faithfully to the last. He hoped that he might not cease to believe in the good news that God had redeemed the world, and might not cease to proclaim it to the world. What

should come of it, he could leave in other hands. If it was God's Gospel, He would take care of it. The seed would fall into the ground. It might die; but, if it did, it would bring forth fruit. Somehow the divine word would be accomplished; only might he not, under any pressure from without and within, refuse to be an instrument in accomplishing it!

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Was this foresight of not meeting them again on earth something special? If it was, I suppose many who were not apostles have had it given them; it is not that which we should wonder at or covet. But those other words—'I am pure from the blood of all men; I have not shunned to declare to you the counsel of God'—my friends, these are the enviable words. What would it not be worth to any of us that we might dare to use *them*! St. Paul might keep his divine gifts, his rare revelations; we can do without them. But oh! to share this clearness of conscience with him, to have no stain of a brother's blood resting upon it, not to be obliged to say, 'I might have told this man and that what could have made him better and brighter for ever, and I kept it back!' Thanks be to God. He does look upon us in His Son. He does forgive the sins even of His shepherds, for the sake of the Chief Shepherd.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made

you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

‘The flock has been purchased by divine blood, the blood of the Son of God. He has given you His Spirit that you may watch over it.’ That is St. Paul’s lesson to the presbyters of Ephesus. It penetrated his whole being. He wished that it should penetrate theirs. Because he foresaw that another belief than that would creep into the Church—a belief that God is a self-seeking Being, and that man is to be a self-seeker too ; he was sure that wolves would wear the clothing of shepherds, and that the Gospel would be perverted from a message of life into a message of death.

“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.”

What is the connection of the sentences ? Why does he pass from commanding them to God and the word of His grace to speaking of his freedom from covetousness, of his working with his own hands ? This is what I said at the beginning, of the union of his theology with his morality. The foundation of his own acts is laid in the acts of God ; the foundation of

his own character is laid in the character of God. God redeems men with the blood of His own Son. He is able to give up himself for the flock, because the Spirit of God is working in him to will and do of God's good pleasure. He commends them to God and to the word of His grace to sanctify them from that covetousness which is natural to him. He can say that he has overcome that which is natural to him by the force of that same Spirit. He has been able to toil for his livelihood, that he might show that it is the glory of man, as it was the glory of the Son of Man, not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

And thus, therefore, he sums up his whole life and his work. "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

When did the Lord Jesus say that? I do not think any one knows when the actual sentence which St. Paul repeats came out of His lips. I do not think any one who reads the Gospel can find a day or an hour of His pilgrimage on earth in which He was not saying it by words and deeds. If He said that His Father made His sun to shine on the good and evil, on the just and the unjust; if He bade the Pharisees know what that meaneth, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'; if He said the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; if He described His Father as freely and from His heart forgiving the servant who had nothing to pay—He was in all these ways asserting that God delights not, as men think, in receiving, but in giving; that His life is a life of giving. If He ate and drank with

publicans and sinners; if He went about healing the sick and casting out devils; if He poured out His soul unto death—He showed that His delight was to do that will of His Father; that He, therefore, found it more blessed to give than to receive. If He said that He would send the Comforter, that they might remember all He had said, and might do greater works than He had done, He signified that He would realize the law of God's kingdom, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," as a vital and an effectual law on this earth of ours. So St. Paul, remembering those words, was able to fulfil that great law of Christ, was able to triumph over the desire of receiving, to exhibit the bliss of giving.

My friends, I discern in these words the cause of our failures as pastors. If you wish us to be better and truer shepherds, oh! ask this blessing for us above all others, that we may remember these words of our Lord Jesus, and may know the power of them, and may show them forth in our ministrations. Then we may indeed with far greater effect, with far clearer consciences, ask you to share their blessedness. Then we may tell you more confidently that the Spirit of the Eternal Father, the Giver of all good things, and of the Son who gave Himself for all, is with you that you may enter into it; that you may care for it above all that you can receive. But that is true, if we ever so little understand the truth. And you can have that life of God, that blessedness of God in your hearts. And you can make other hearts to know that it is there, and waken them to partake of it. Every day furnishes opportunities for realizing it. Here is one.

You know, most of you, what it is to feel the weariness of recovering or half-recovering from sickness. You know what it is, though your rooms are airy, though you have nourishing food suitable for the state of invalids, though you may not be called to any strenuous work. You still long for other breezes than you can find in London ; your physician tells you that you cannot safely dispense with them. Think of men and women turned, in a state of very imperfect cure, out of hospitals ; forced to go about hard work, if they can find work, and are not left to the greater misery of being without it. Think of those who in close stifling rooms have passed through various periods of disease, who have much ado to get common necessaries, to say nothing of that which the sick crave for. Think of them dragging their tools wearily about the streets, or going to their employment with a sense of pain and weariness which no medicine could relieve. Think of these things, and then ask whether to help such people, to give them the encouragement of believing that they can be helped, that some are caring for them—is not more blessed than to receive many treasures of your own ? to taste much of what is called enjoyment ? The Convalescent Institute has been devised to meet such cases. It provides in its home at Walton for those whom no hospital can provide for. It gives them just a taste of the leisure and fresh air without which we feel as if we could not exist. It sends its patients back capable of exertion, capable of facing the troubles which they must anyhow meet with. By what it does ; by what it suggests ; by the positive benefits it gives to the poor ; by the examples it gives to the rich, I know not what

institution renders back a greater interest for any money which is laid out upon it than the "Convalescent." I commend it to your hearty sympathies.

There was much sorrow when St. Paul took leave of the Ephesian elders. But they who saw him no more could have fellowship with him, such as no sight of him could have given, when they acted upon his lessons. And we shall have fellowship with them and with him, if we labour to support the weak, if we remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

XXIX.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(20th July, 1862.)

“We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”—Acts xxiv. 5.

ST. LUKE tell us, in his 21st chapter, that when St. Paul’s ship landed at Tyre to unlade her burden, certain disciples “said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.” Afterwards at Cæsarea a prophet named Agabus, who came down from Judæa, took Paul’s girdle, and binding with it his own hands and feet, said, “Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle.” Were not these divine admonitions? Was an apostle not bound to heed them? Paul’s friends thought so. He thought otherwise. He did not doubt that all gifts of insight and foresight are gifts of God’s Spirit. The more they were perverted to evil purposes, to private or selfish ends, the more he would refer them to their high original, to Him who would direct them to their right and human use. But all true messages from heaven are to awaken the conscience in us, not to bind it. If

any man forgets that he is under the guidance of God's Spirit; that that Spirit is directing the thoughts and intents of his heart; if under pretence of obeying some heavenly voice he turns backward, when the witness in himself is that he should go forward, he commits a sin, and becomes the victim of a delusion. No doubt the people in St. Paul's days wondered at his boldness in defying the opinions of prophets and prophetesses, perhaps deemed it profaneness. But by it he bore a testimony concerning the true nature and meaning of spiritual gifts, by it he vindicated them from those fanatical applications which have been the excuse for so much cowardice, so many atrocious crimes. The Holy Spirit with whom, as St. Paul believed, Christ came to baptize all nations is not the author of this cowardice or these crimes, but the protector from them. The humblest man who confesses the presence and government of a divine Spirit is preserved from slavery, as well to his own judgment as to the judgment of the wisest and devoutest men.

When they came to Jerusalem, "the brethren," says St. Luke, "received us gladly." It may have been a surprise to the apostle that they did so. He knew profoundly how Jewish James and the Jerusalem Church were; how suspicious they were likely to be of one who had mixed with Greeks, and to them had become a Greek. Cordiality from them was a blessing he could hardly have reckoned upon. That they should advise him to give proofs that he was still a Jew, walking orderly and adhering to the customs of his fathers, was entirely natural and reasonable. They proposed that he should join certain of the brethren

who had taken a temporary vow upon them, and should be purified with them in the Temple. Such a proceeding involved no departure from his idea of Christian liberty. He had done the like at Cenchrea of his own accord. It became a circumcised man to do acts which it would have been an affectation and a denial of the higher covenant in an uncircumcised man to do. Whilst the elders at Jerusalem acknowledged the rights of their Gentile brethren, it was a vindication of St. Paul's maxim that "every man" should "abide in the same calling wherein he was called"—that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availleth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"—to comply with any practices of a worship which still existed, to show any reverence for a temple which had not yet been thrown down.

Those, however, who resort to compliances of this kind, not from reverence to that which is divine, not from tenderness to human feelings and affections, but through hope of conciliating enemies, should study St. Paul's story. This act of his appears to have precipitated the violence which he knew would sooner or later overtake him. Jews of Asia found him in the Temple. They had seen him in the city with Trophimus, an Ephesian. Of course he had taken him into the Temple, polluting it. They cried, "Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." The scene which followed is as much a passage out of the story of the latter days of the holy city as out of the life of St. Paul.

“And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.”

The military commander had saved the apostle, as he would any other victim of mob frenzy, though he has imagined him to be an Egyptian bandit. When he is relieved of that impression, he allows Paul to speak to the people. He addresses them in Hebrew. There is silence. He may be more loyal to his country than they had supposed. He tells them of his education among them under one of their great rabbis; of the commission he received from the High Priest; of his journey to Damascus; of the light that shone about him; of the voice that spoke to him. To all this they give heed. Sadducees in the crowd may scoff at such visions. But the majority have a belief in divine communications. This light may have been from heaven; this voice may have been an angel’s.

He tells them of his baptism. That did not awaken indignation. The citizens of Jerusalem were hardened by this time to the presence of Nazarenes calling themselves a church. He alluded to a visit he had paid to Jerusalem; to a trance in the Temple. Still the commotion is not renewed. He approaches a more dangerous topic. He refers to the death of Stephen. He confesses his own share in it, and his repentance for the crime. Those who could trace the movements of that multitude might perhaps have seen that the tempest was rising when these words were spoken, for Stephen had been accused of attacking the law and the holy place. But they “gave him audience” till he spoke of going to the Gentiles—of that being his commission—“and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.”

This was the war cry. He had known from the first that it would be this. He might profess his belief in Jesus of Nazareth, or any teacher whatsoever, so long as he supposed him to be merely a teacher of the Jews. He might even give this teacher regal honours, nay, supernatural honours. He might be regarded as a divine person descended among the chosen people to reform them, and through them perhaps ultimately to reform and conquer the world. But the moment that he was proclaimed as the Head of all mankind, the rage of those who thought that all the nations were accursed for their sake would burst forth. He who believed in a Saviour and King of the *Gentiles* was not worthy to live.

The Roman commander, ignorant of what had been said in that strange dialect; provoked perhaps at the

permission which he had granted, since this had been the result, commanded to examine him by scourging, to learn what he had done. He, however, is startled by finding that he has been about to insult the person of one who had obtained the freedom of the City, not like himself by purchase, but by birth. He begins to feel respect for his prisoner; if he cannot have a fairer tribunal, he is at least entitled to such justice as the authorities of his own nation will do him. He "commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

The apostle ventured to speak to this assembly less as a criminal than as a citizen demanding justice. "Men and brethren," he said, "earnestly beholding" them, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." The High Priest,—anxious no doubt to exhibit the dignity of the ruler in the Sanhedrim in the presence of the military authority which had somewhat peremptorily convoked it,—"commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth." How the Roman was impressed by this act we are not told. St. Paul was stirred by it to say, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" The mockery of the forms of justice among men from whom the idea of justice, the belief in justice, has departed is very ghastly. But reverence is due even to a whited wall, which stands as the symbol of what once glorified a land. When St. Paul knew that he had applied the title to the High Priest—there, probably, without his official robes—he remembered the words, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people," and repented.

Did he repent in later days of another act, which St. Luke commemorates, while he was standing before the Sanhedrim ?

“ When Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee : of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.” If he had spoken these words to secure the interest of a triumphant party, I am sure he would have mourned over them afterwards, however he might be tempted at the moment to use them. But the Pharisees were not now a triumphant party. The higher offices were in the hands of their opponents. A man who had known them in his youth, who had learnt certain truths from them, however much these had been perverted by their pride and his own, might claim fellowship with them in those truths ; might think that by doing so he was making the last and only effort he could make to reclaim them from their fate, to restore them to the state of true Israelites. So I interpret St. Paul’s cry, “ I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee,” a cry which met a response in the Pharisee soul, but which only embittered the rage of the parties against each other, and nearly cost St. Paul his life.

The chief captain again interfered, and by force took him from them and conveyed him to the castle. There the prisoner received a divine assurance that as he had borne witness for Christ in Jerusalem, he should bear witness for Him in Rome ; there he and his protector had a new discovery of the state of society in the holy city.

The Sadducees and Pharisees were the nominal

representatives of Jewish opinion. The Zealots were really stronger than both. Their creed was a simple one. Not to wait for the slow processes of law, but to assassinate the enemies of God was the best way of pleasing Him. The priests were ready to use these men as their instruments; practically the Zealots became the masters and they the tools. Forty of these vowed that they would neither eat nor drink till they had slain Paul. The rulers of the Sanhedrim were to demand his person of the chief captain that they might examine into his cause. Before he reached the judgment hall the sentence upon him would be executed.

The chief captain averts the crime as a Roman soldier would—promptly and calmly. The prisoner is conveyed by night under a sufficient guard to Antipatris; thence he is taken the next day to Cæsarea, and placed under the care of the governor of the province. Thither the scene now shifts. Cæsarea is in all respects a curious transition point between Jerusalem and Rome. It was built by Herod the Great. It had become the residence of the Roman procurators of Judæa. It bore the name of the emperor to whose honour Herod had dedicated it. The Jewish and the Gentile Church had its first home in Antioch. The Jewish and Gentile worlds might be said to be nowhere so remarkably combined, if not united, as in Cæsarea. In that city St. Paul spent two years. In that city his cause was heard by two successive Roman procurators, by one prince of the Herodian family.

It was a suit of a strange nature which the High Priest and the Jewish rulers had to follow when they

came hither to accuse Paul. His real offence was that he had associated with Heathens. Could this be shown to be an offence before a Heathen magistrate? Had they stated the case for themselves, they would have fallen into this perplexity. But there were rhetoricians in every province of the empire, who would undertake the most difficult cases, and present them in plausible shapes to the magistrate. The epithets to which Tertullus, who was hired for the occasion, resorted—"a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes"—may strike us as loose and vulgar, but they were exceedingly well chosen for his purpose. There were seditions going on among the Jews throughout the world. The Roman governor knew it, and was interested in the suppression of such seditions, which greatly disturbed the dominion of the Cæsars. The ringleader of a sect was a man most likely to stir such tumults. What he taught was of little importance; any doctrine might be pestilent if it made men discontented.

St. Paul might, in his defence, have disclaimed the accusations which it was the policy of Tertullus to make. He might have said that he was suspected by the Jews because he was free from their prejudices against foreigners. But he uses no such advantage. He pleads as a Jew on Jewish grounds. He challenges them to show that he went to Jerusalem for any other purpose than to bring alms and offerings to his nation; or entered the Temple for any other purpose than to worship in it according to the customs of the land. They charge him with belonging to a heresy or sect. He affirms that he

worships the God of his fathers; that he holds the faith of a resurrection of the just and unjust, which Jews of that day hold; that he exercises himself “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” He asks them to declare what evil doings they have found in him, except it were evil doing to cry in the council, “Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.”

In thus stating his case the ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes has not alluded to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He has vindicated his position as a faithful Jew. If Felix liked to enquire how he preached the resurrection of the dead, whom he affirmed to have risen, in whom he said men were to rise, he might do so. And this, it appears, was the purpose of Felix. The translator represents him as deferring his opening of the cause because he had a more perfect knowledge of that way. I believe St. Luke means to say, that he might obtain a more perfect knowledge of that way,—way being the word commonly used to denote the Christian doctrine and mode of life.

In accordance with this intention, we find him returning after an interval to Cæsarea with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, and sending for Paul that he might hear him concerning the faith of Christ. Drusilla’s education might help her to explain many things which had puzzled him. She, doubtless, would understand the strange phrases of the child of Abraham. If he mixed any other lore with that of his race the Roman would detect it.

Neither knew how well they should understand his speech. For the freedman of Claudius, who had risen

by his master's favour to the high office which he had made hateful by crimes public and private, heard not of certain opinions—which might be received or rejected—but of a Righteousness which should assert itself and come forth to judgment. And Drusilla, a beautiful Jewish adulteress, the victim of vile acts and of her own passions, heard of a temperance and self-restraint in which she might have walked, and of the deep fall into sin which no comforts or luxuries could make otherwise than horrible and deadly.

It was not an idle, leisurely examination into a certain way, Jewish or Heathen. The Eternal Judge of heaven was speaking to him, one of the judges of the earth. He did not debate, but he trembled, and bade the preacher come again at a more convenient season. And even that message which Drusilla heard, and which made Felix quail, was to be preached to her land and to his, not by the lips of an apostle, but in the thunder and the whirlwind. Oh how willingly would Jerusalem have thought, would Rome have thought, that it was only a message about a certain doctrine, or sect, or way of thinking ! How readily would the adulterers and murderers in each have concealed themselves under any opinion, any scheme of worship ! But the call was a call from the Living God, not from some feeble, mortal man, to put off their sins, to put on the divine righteousness ; the assurance which went above all titles, all sins, that Righteousness would turn to Judgment ; that all unrighteousness must melt away before it. Very soon one of these cities was to drink to the dregs the cup of trembling ; very soon it was to be-

come a spectacle and a warning to every nation of the earth. The spectacle of a nation falling in spite of religious professions, in the midst of religious sects, those professions aggravating all crimes, those sects hastening its doom. A warning to every nation that as the rejection of Christ was the rejection not of the head of a sect, but of the Righteous King of men ; so the confession of Christ must be the confession of a living and eternal Righteousness, and must bear fruits of Righteousness ; otherwise, the nation which makes the confession will perish by a judgment as terrible as that of Jerusalem.

XXX.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(27th July, 1862.)

“And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”—Acts xxviii. 16.

THE book of the Acts of the Apostles opens with the Ascension of Christ into heaven. It terminates with the appearance of Saul of Tarsus as a prisoner in Rome. What connection is there between these two events? How can a Church History beginning with such glory conclude in such humiliation? If we follow the history of St. Paul from the point at which we left it last Sunday, we may find an answer to these questions.

He has been two years in Cæsarea. When Felix was removed from his office he left Paul bound. He had given much needless offence to the Jews, he would leave them this slight compensation at parting. Porcius Festus, his successor, cannot have been grateful to him for the legacy of such a cause. On his first visit to Jerusalem, the priests were eager with him to bring the prisoner there. Perhaps he saw something suspicious in their importunity, or he wished

to assert the dignity of the Roman seat of government, for he bade them follow him to Cæsarea. The accusation and the defence involved points which seemed to him trivial and perplexing. He might gain some light upon them in Jerusalem, and, at the same time, please a people whom he should often be obliged to coerce. He would, however, give the prisoner his option as to place. Wherever he was tried, he would not give him over to the mercy of the Sanhedrim. "Wilt thou," he said, "go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar."

In this instance, you will say, St. Paul was not preaching a gospel, but standing upon his right as a Roman citizen. I think he was preaching a gospel, because he was standing upon his rights as a Roman citizen. His gospel was that of a Kingdom of Righteousness. The Son of God and the Son of Man was, he declared, the righteous King over Jews and over Romans. In the heart of every man, in the institutions of every nation, St. Paul perceived the recognition of such a King. The Jews, whose law and polity bore the greatest witness of Him, had utterly disowned Him, had chosen disorder and unrighteousness. In the tribunals of Rome, in her forms of justice, this acknowledgment still subsisted. God was upholding it, however its nominal administrators might trifle with

it, or set it at nought. “I appeal to Cæsar,” meant ‘I appeal to the justice which you confess. Is it in you or not? Are these forms mere shadows or do they mean something?’ Here was a double message; a message to his own countrymen, that unrighteousness in the children of the covenant was the same as unrighteousness in other men—only a struggle against greater light—and would meet with the same condemnation; a message to the heathens, such as he had already delivered to Felix, that they would be judged not for failing in what they did not know, but for departing from the standard of justice of which their polity spoke, to which their consciences did homage. A man in bonds could bring them to this test, not by going out of his way to deliver a sermon, but by simply insisting on the privileges which the Roman law gave him.

“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.” There may have been a smile upon his lips when he thought what the Cæsar was to whom the accused man was appealing. He may have fancied that the poor Jew was committing himself in pure ignorance to the mercies of Nero. But at all events his course was clear. If the man who had been driven out of Jerusalem wished to see Rome, he should see it, or so much of it as was visible from a prison.

The next passage of the story brings another figure before us, a friend of Festus, in many points very unlike him. The Procurator is purely a Roman, with a Roman sense of equity, with a Roman contempt for Jewish controversies, Jewish beliefs, Jewish notions of

evidence ; with the haughtiness of one of a superior and conquering race ; with something of the magnanimity of the race which boasted that it beat down the proud and spared the fallen. Agrippa is the representative of that Herodian family, which had maintained its difficult position by skilful compliances with the prejudices of its Jewish subjects, and by suppleness with Roman patrons. This Agrippa, born into more difficult times, had all the cleverness and all the dishonesty of his predecessors. He had made himself expert with the customs and questions which Festus thought ridiculous. With no patriotism—scarcely knowing to which country he should be patriotic—he was yet able to restrain the Jews from frivolous collisions with the power which must at last crush them, oftener still to extend the bounds of his own previous dominion. St. Paul's speech before Agrippa is very unlike his answer to Tertullus. The difference is not what we should perhaps have expected. In the presence of the Roman procurator he simply repelled the charge of departing from the faith of a Jew. In speaking before the half Jewish king he boldly described the vision upon the road to Damascus, which had changed him from a Pharisee into a preacher to the Gentiles. If his purpose had been to win a cause, and not to bear a testimony, the order of the apologies would have been reversed. The character of the men would have dictated that change to an ordinary advocate. Felix might have trembled at a voice from heaven. The indifferent Agrippa would be likely to treat it as one of many such stories which he had read of in Jewish books. But the apostle, believing that where he was to go, and

what he was to do or to suffer, would be determined by another wisdom than that of Agrippa, or Festus, or Nero, spoke to each as it was given him to speak, and left his words for the use of generations which should be born after the kingdom of the Herods, and the dominion of Roman procurators, and the empire itself should have passed away.

A light shining into the heart and spirit of a Pharisee, for a time blinding his bodily sight ; a light which could open many eyes and turn them from darkness ; a light to the people and to the Gentiles—this was what St. Paul spoke of to Festus and Agrippa. To the first it seemed the utterance of a mere madman. How could light come forth from the unseen world ? What darkness was there in Jew or Gentile which such a light could scatter ? So thought the heathen who had been from childhood hearing of a God of light, who shined upon men in the sun and taught them in his oracles. Of course such things were sung by poets. But who cared for them ? Who attached any sense to them ? And here was a Jew whose head had been so turned by reading in his cabalistical books that he actually supposed there was a light above, and that there was a capacity in men below to receive it !

St. Paul turned to the other judge, not as to a better man, but as to one who was better acquainted with what had been passing in his own region in his own day, and with what had been written by the seers of that region in former days. The story of Saul's conversion he had probably heard ; the story of the birth, and death, and resurrection of Jesus he had certainly heard. “ This thing was not done in a corner.” And

all these expressions about light and darkness; the promise of a light which should arise and shine upon Jews and Gentiles; the association of this promise with an actual King who was some day to appear, were well known to readers of the prophecies. "King Agrippa," he said, suddenly turning to him, "believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." "Thou hast read them, and I know that there is something in thee which answers to their words, which confesses them to be true." "Almost," he answered, —evading the question by a compliment and a sneer combined,—"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." "Such eloquence as this might make me more than a believer in the prophets. I could nearly become one of thy own Nazarene sect." The words have been tortured into various significations; they are, no doubt, susceptible of different applications. But this, I suspect, was their original force. Their chief worth lies in the words which they called forth—the most beautiful that a prisoner ever addressed to a judge—"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

"This man," said Agrippa, "might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar." But he had appealed to Caesar, and we may thank God that it was not in the power of his provincial judge to undo his own act. But why was it necessary to tell so minutely the particulars of his voyage to Rome? Can we care to interrupt the history of the conversion of the nations that we may hear debates about the undergirding of a ship and the casting out of the tackling? Or are we to suppose

that there is some profound spiritual allegory beneath this plain and sailor-like narrative?

My friends, an allegory is the very last thing I should dream of. I think, as I said respecting another passage, that what we require most in a book which builds everything upon the union of the divine and the human nature in Christ, which claims us for the Kingdom of Heaven, that we may live a true life upon earth, is that it should exhibit no shrinking from the most common and prosaic facts. Literal details, which make us sure that the writer does not dwell in cloudbase himself, and does not mean us to dwell in it, are for this purpose of unspeakable value. Closely connected with this remark is another which I have also in part anticipated to-day. Oftentimes men out at sea with an ordinary crew, especially with a heathen crew, might think themselves called upon to preach to them about the near prospect of death, and the way in which they might save their souls. They may ask themselves eagerly and anxiously how an apostle would have behaved in such an emergency. Of course he would not have troubled himself about mere mundane circumstances connected with the conduct of the vessel, or the bodily health of the passengers. The only doubt must be how he would find and seize opportunities to divert the minds of men in great trial from such considerations, and to occupy them with their more important interests.

St. Luke gives us the answer. St. Paul makes no discourse to the passengers on his vessel about the prospect of death or the terrors of a worse death. He takes the liveliest concern in all that they are doing, encourages them continually, begs them to take

food, defeats the selfish plans of the sailors to save themselves. All is simple, natural, practical in his proceedings. And so he is a preacher. So he bears witness for the God, whose he is and whom he serves. So he cultivates a faith in that God, and undermines their notions of false gods who could not be trusted, who were plotting their destruction. Surely, if we take this lesson home, we shall not find the account of the voyage irrelevant—the history one useless to ourselves.

Nor will the subsequent passage respecting the barbarous people of the isle of Melita be without its deep moral. As another aspect of the man who became all things to all men ; as another lesson about the various ways in which human beings may be addressed, so long as they are confessed to be human, it is full of interest. While the apostle is gathering sticks for the fire a viper settles on his hand. It is of course a sign of the vengeance of the superior powers against evil doers. He shakes it off and finds no hurt. He passes for a divinity. He cures a sick man—a chief on the island. The prisoner has done his work. He does not stay to receive honours which are not his. He has left behind him the witness of an unseen King in whose power men may trust, who is a Deliverer and a Healer. Was not this essentially the same message which he delivered in noble words to the philosophers of Athens ?

And with that same message he goes to the visible centre of all the powers, the focus of all the civilization of the earth. It has disciples of Jesus. They come to meet him at the Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. He thanks God and takes

courage at the sight of such friends. They are evidently few; if they constitute a society it is one which has yet scarcely attracted any notice. When he has obtained permission to receive visitors at the house in which a soldier watches he invites not these, but his countrymen of any class. He tells them why he has appealed to the Emperor. He makes no complaint of Israelites; he says that "for the hope of Israel" he is bound with that chain. They ask him to tell what he thinks of this new sect which is everywhere spoken against. They come and hold discourse with him. They finally separate from him when he had spoken this word: "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

So ends the first great chapter of Christian history. The people of the covenant have lost the faculty of owning anything that is spiritual. They are given up to the earthly and the visible, to the worship of the Mainmon whom they have preferred to God; to him who has no power to unite any creatures, who has only power to keep them asunder. To the other nations the Gospel is preached of a Father who has exalted His Son to His own right hand, and has made Him Lord

of heaven and earth; who has sent His Spirit to govern their hearts and teach them of the Father and the Son. The Gospel of that universal kingdom which has been heard in Palestine, in Asia Minor, in the Greek cities, now stands face to face with the universal kingdom of the Cæsars. The proclamation of the God-Man meets the actual dominion of the Man-God. The Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom which is at this time governed by Nero must try issues with each other; it must be ascertained by the struggle of centuries which is the stronger.

Here, then, is the answer to the first question with which I started—What the relation is between the Ascension of Christ and the coming of Paul to Rome? He has no message to Rome, except as he comes to speak of an ascended Christ. He has no battle with Rome, except as he comes to proclaim an ascended Christ. If the crucified Man is not the Lord of all, there is no Kingdom about which a Gospel can be preached. If the crucified Man is not ascended on high, there is none which puts in peril the tyranny of the Cæsars.

But I ask another question. Why should a man bound with chains be the fittest to speak of that glory to men? If what I have said has not resolved this question, the experience of eighteen centuries must be called in to resolve it. Rome became the seat of a Christian kingdom, of a priestly kingdom. To it the nations of the earth turned again as their centre; in it the cross stood as the symbol of conquering power. But the King and Priest who had ascended on high was lost in the king and priest who dwelt on the seven hills. Heaven and earth were

again divided ; only an image of the heavenly kingdom was to be seen on earth. Such a kingdom was no assertion of the glory of man, because it was no assertion of the glory of God. But it bore witness of a unity among churches and nations. Those which maintained their Christian freedom by breaking loose from it appeared to lose their unity, and to become sects like those which destroyed the Jewish commonwealth. How may this division cease ? How may a real, not a fictitious unity, be evolved out of it ? Not by might or power, but by the Spirit, must that division cease, must that unity be established. The voice of him who entered Rome a prisoner must be heard above all the voices of all who have dwelt in it as princes. That voice will be heard by the captives of the earth. They will rise up a great army to declare that One who suffered with them, and came to set them free, is gone up on high to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

If that prisoner's voice has ever reached your hearts, whilst you have listened to these lectures on the book which contains the story of his conversion, of his labours, of his sufferings ; if ever he and the other apostles have brought home to you the truth that Christ has really ascended, and has received gifts for men, not of our age but of all ages ; if ever you have felt that we are the inheritors of those treasures which he and they stood before councils and rulers to vindicate for all the nations—may those convictions not perish but grow stronger and deeper and more effectual day by day ! May we ask ourselves more and more what it is to be members of the Church of the living and ascended Lord, and how we may assert that

glory! May we desire that our thoughts of our position should be lofty as He is, who is our Mediator at God's right hand; but be humble and lowly as He was, who humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant, and came not to be ministered to but to minister! May we indeed desire to live as branches of that true vine of which the Father is husbandman, and which He desires should bring forth much fruit!

I would rather that we did not separate after hearing such words without giving some tokens of our interest in the sheep and lambs of the flock. I commend to you specially the children in the schools of your own district.

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